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NARRATING JACKSON STATE: AN EXAMINATION OF POWER RELATIONS AND
MISSISSIPPI NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 1970 SHOOTINGS AT JACKSON
STATE COLLEGE

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies at
The University of Mississippi

by

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April 2014

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines media coverage of a 1970 campus shooting at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, during which two black students were killed and several others were injured. Over forty years after the shootings, the incident remains largely absent from the dominant historical narrative. This study posits that the contradictory accounts published by various Jackson-area news outlets blurred the lines between facts and subjective perspectives and as a consequence limited the resources used by historians to construct a narrative of the shootings. Consequently, Mississippi media outlets contributed to the incident's absence from the dominant historical narrative and popular memory. The thesis considers history and journalism theories and methodologies in an interdisciplinary approach that allows for an examination of reports from Jackson newspaper outlets, as well as the social and political environments that shaped the media coverage that emerged from Jackson in the weeks following the incident.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

AP	Associated Press
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
JSC	Jackson State College
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SSOC	Southern Student Organizing Committee

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This thesis is dedicated to the victims of the 1970 shootings at Jackson State College. For their direction and support, I thank my advisor, Dr. Kathleen Wickham, and my committee members, Drs. David Wharton and Barbara Combs. I also thank David Doggett for his insight to the Jackson counterculture movement and the mechanics of operating an underground newspaper in Mississippi. I owe appreciation to friends and family members who listened without objection and offered words of encouragement throughout the research and writing processes. Lastly, I thank my mother, Donna Sing, for hours well spent in microfilm archives during the early days of this project.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 30, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced plans to invade Cambodia as an extension of the United State's military campaign in Southeast Asia. The announcement negated the president's previous declaration to withdraw 150,000 troops from Vietnam over a period of one year, and opponents of the war reacted swiftly to Nixon's address.¹ College campuses across the U.S. erupted in antiwar demonstrations, but few campus protests received the level of national attention given to the May 4, 1970, incident at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, during which National Guardsmen opened fire on unarmed protestors, killing four students and injuring nine others. The incident dominated news headlines for months, and popular culture dubbed the event the "Kent State Massacre," a name that commands a firm place in the nation's dominant historical narrative.

The clash at Kent State fueled additional protests nationwide. Ten days after the Ohio shootings, law enforcement again subdued college protestors with gunfire as police in Jackson, Mississippi, shot into a group of students gathered in front of a women's dormitory at Jackson State College. This time, shotgun blasts killed two students and injured twelve others. Although young lives were lost during both incidents, the shootings at Jackson State remain largely absent from the nation's existing historical narrative, while those at Kent State appear everywhere from history books to museum exhibits and rock 'n' roll records.

¹ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia" (speech, April 30, 1970), accessed February 18, 2013, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3890>.

Scholars widely accept the notion that the Jackson State shootings fall under the shadow of the shootings at Kent State. This inquiry follows that assessment and attempts to identify the processes that contribute to the silencing of the Jackson State shootings in the dominant historical narrative.² The thesis looks to Mississippi newspaper coverage as a contributing factor to the Jackson State shootings' absence from popular history. In the aftermath of the event, competing newspaper outlets in Jackson published conflicting accounts of the incident. The study proposes that these representations added to historians' difficulty in defining the Jackson State shootings, and as a consequence affected their presence in the historical narrative. A selection of articles from several Jackson-area newspapers, including *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, the *Kudzu*, and the *Jackson Advocate*, simultaneously offers a sample of the messages that were published by local news media and lends insight to the competing social groups in Jackson at the time of the shootings. This study does not offer an inclusive account of either news media outlets or the various community groups in Jackson, but instead provides an entry to the complex social milieu of the city.

The study does not assume that news media serve as a primary historical authority, but instead examines the press's power to influence public opinion, as well as its service as a resource for historians. The analysis ultimately seeks to answer questions such as: How did the economic, political, and cultural institutions in Jackson influence the city's media coverage? What messages did the Jackson news media communicate to its audiences? How are those messages received? Finally, how might the influence of these social practices have contributed to the shootings' absence from historical memory? An analysis of news coverage of the Jackson

² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995).

State shootings offers a closer look at the interdependence of the aforementioned institutions, illustrating the symbiotic relationships between news media and sociopolitical establishments.

Because the shootings at Jackson State largely escape national memory, it is necessary to recount the events from May 13, 1970, to May 15, 1970. On the evening of May 13, students at Jackson State began throwing rocks and other debris at white motorists as they crossed the campus on Lynch Street, a throughway that bisected the Jackson State campus. Police responded to reports of arson on campus, joining Jackson State administrators in efforts to suppress a growing number of students gathering on campus.³

Mississippi governor, John Bell Williams, requested the aid of the Jackson Police Department and the District One Highway Patrol in hopes of preventing additional conflict with the students.⁴ General Walter Johnson ordered the Mississippi National Guard to locations near the Jackson State campus and directed troops to wait for further orders. Local and state forces hoped to quell student activity by making law enforcement visible, and while this tactic proved mostly successful, various reports document aggressive acts committed by students. Chief Detective of the Jackson Police Department, M.B. Pierce, claimed that rioters broke several windows, opened small arms fire, and threw two firebombs into ROTC barracks.⁵ Although additional violence seemed inevitable, lawmen retreated by 3:00 a.m. on the morning of May 14, and the community breathed a sigh of relief as it escaped a clash between police and students.

The following night, students again gathered at Jackson State College. City police began monitoring the situation in response to reports from white motorists who claimed that students were throwing rocks at cars as they passed through campus. National Guardsmen remained on

³ Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 33-52.

⁴ *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, 417; 423-24.

⁵ M.B. Pierce, *Police Statement*. 20 May 1970. Jackson, Mississippi.

stand-by at a location more than 20 minutes from Jackson State. The situation escalated as students set fire to a dump truck on campus, and city police and Mississippi highway patrolmen were dispatched to the campus just after 11:00 p.m. Students gathered near Stewart Hall, and law officers positioned themselves in a line between the crowd and the burning truck. National Guardsmen took positions at each end of the campus on Lynch Street. Following a series of miscommunications between government forces, Jackson policemen and Mississippi highway patrolmen trailed behind a military tank toward another crowd of students that had gathered near Alexander Hall, a women's dormitory, with the intention of dispersing the crowd. Highway patrolmen aligned themselves to the north and west of the tank, and city police formed lines along its south and east ends. Officers endured verbal attacks from the group of students, and Jackson Police Lieutenant Warren Magee countered with the use of a megaphone, ordering the students to disperse.⁶ At just after midnight a glass bottle exploded on the ground near police lines. When a second bottle shattered close by, law enforcement opened fire on the crowd of students, firing upwards of 150 rounds into Alexander Hall and the crowd of students gathered outside the dormitory.⁷

When the smoke cleared, two young men lay dead. The body of Phillip Gibbs, a junior at Jackson State College, was found near a small magnolia tree in front of Alexander Hall. James Earl Green, a student at nearby Jim Hill High School, caught gunfire as he walked across campus to return home from his evening job at a grocery store.⁸ He was found near Roberts Hall, across Lynch Street from Alexander Hall. Twelve others reported injuries from police fire. Sergeant Truitt Beasley, a Jackson policeman, radioed for emergency medical care, instructing a

⁶ *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, 417-430.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁸ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 74.

dispatcher to “send all that you can get.”⁹ As multiple ambulances arrived on the scene, uninjured students helped the wounded. Police instructed Jackson State security guards to search Alexander Hall for a sniper, but none was found. Instead, guards encountered mass hysteria. The space was filled with the distressed cries of students and the blood of those injured by the barrage of shotgun blasts from police. Emergency vehicles transported the wounded to the emergency room at University Medical Center, four miles north of campus. Reports allege that hospital workers at nearby Baptist Hospital turned away one ambulance driver, claiming it had no room for the students.¹⁰

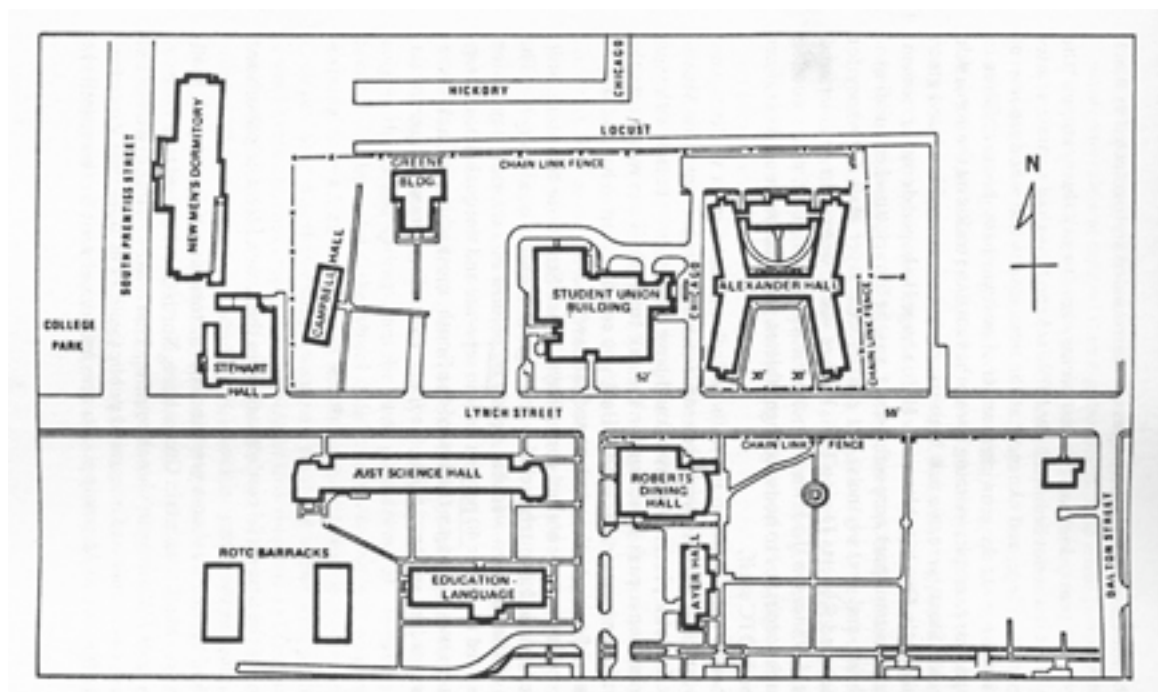


Figure 1. Map of Jackson State College Campus. Copy: The President's Commission on Campus Unrest

Early statements made by government officials after the shootings alluded to a blame game that would unfold in the pages of Jackson's newspaper outlets. When asked about the events, Jackson Mayor Russell Davis at once lamented the bloodshed and excused the actions of

⁹ Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

law enforcement, saying, “This is the darkest day of my life . . . events of recent weeks in our nation, including this one this morning, should point out that whenever people resort to the streets for whatever cause and armed men are sent into the area to restore order, disaster such as we have suffered is likely to explode.”¹¹ He suggested that the police response was likely the result of the human body’s natural defense mechanisms in the first of many statements that defended the actions of law enforcement.

Leaders of Jackson’s black community reacted in an opposite manner. Robert Clark, who served as the only black representative in the Mississippi senate in 1970, spoke out against the “killing and indiscriminate firing upon black students.” Clark declared that the gunfire “could under no conceivable circumstances have been justifiable or lawful.”¹² Alex Waites, the NAACP field secretary for the state of Mississippi, said, “We cannot find justification for shooting fleeing students regardless of provocation.”¹³

News coverage from Jackson’s mainstream newspaper, *The Clarion-Ledger*, and its sister publication, the *Jackson Daily News*, echoed the agendas of Jackson’s white power holders as it demonized the actions of black students and heralded those of Mississippi law enforcement officers. Marginal publications, such as the *Kudzu*, defended the students’ right to peaceful protest as its coverage condemned the shootings. The *Jackson Advocate*, a black weekly newspaper criticized for bending to pressures from Mississippi’s political powers, largely avoided coverage of the incident itself, instead commenting on a boycott of white businesses initiated to protest the shootings. The range of media accounts from these outlets concurrently

¹¹ Ed Williams, “Jackson State College,” in *Augusta, Georgia, and Jackson State University: Southern Episodes in a National Tragedy* (Southern Regional Council, 1970), 55.

¹² Williams, “Jackson State College,” 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

offered conflicting perspectives of the event and blurred the lines between facts and subjective perceptions.

FRAMEWORK AND OBJECTIVES

Historians acknowledge the use of newspaper coverage as a foundation for forming historical narratives. Although the validity and objectivity of newspaper reports may be questionable in some cases, historians nonetheless point to news media as an indicator of which events are newsworthy and to some degree, a measure of which events are historically significant.

Historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot comments on the shaping of historical narratives through a process he terms, “narrative silencing.” Trouillot submits that historical narratives contain “a particular bundle of silences,” and those who direct the narrative shape these “bundles.”¹⁴ His method looks closely at the social conditions that produce historical narratives, considering the established institutions that often influence the production of a specific narrative. As the media reports in this study show, Jackson’s social and political institutions held a heavy hand in shaping the news coverage that emerged from the city’s mainstream press outlets, and the establishment also used its powers to control the coverage of alternative outlets whose agenda may have differed from that of the state. In effect, the Mississippi establishment silenced the voice of its black community through its manipulation of media resources.

To evaluate the economic, political, and cultural environment in Jackson, this study looks to Norman Fairclough’s work in Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough’s approach aims to discover how discourse is implicated in power relations. He illustrates the interconnectedness of discourse and social practices (including economic, political, and cultural practices), a method

¹⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 25-27.

which allows for an examination of the social institutions in Jackson.¹⁵ Fairclough employs three processes of analysis. First, he considers the objects of analysis, or in this case, the news coverage. Second, Fairclough looks to the methods by which objects of analysis is produced and received. In other words, who or what is involved in the production of the texts, and how does the audience respond to texts? Last, he considers the socio-historical conditions that direct these methods. This technique provides a loose model by which the media's role in the social practices of Jackson may be assessed, illuminating the links between power relations, social practices, and the news media.

Michael Schudson adds to the discussion of power relations by suggesting that the media wields a power of its own. "The media may have influence by legitimating or providing a kind of aura to information simply because the information appears in a place that carries prestige and public legitimacy," writes Schudson.¹⁶ This compliments agenda-setting, an approach commonly used in journalism studies to evaluate the news media's ability to influence not what people think, but instead what they think about.¹⁷ News outlets employ various techniques to accomplish an agenda, including, but not limited to, editorial intent, article placement, and the use of images to supplement news coverage.

The media analysis also considers James Carey's ritual view of communication, which casts communication as a tool to reinforce common values within a society, with the goal of cohesion in a given society.¹⁸ Because Carey's ritual view of communication accepts the

¹⁵ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: E. Arnold, 1995).

¹⁶ Michael Schudson, "The News Media as Political Institutions," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (June 2002): 265.

¹⁷ Donald Lewis. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-setting Function of the Press* (St. Paul: West Pub., 1977).

¹⁸ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

function of societal elements in media processes, it allows for an increased holistic analysis of the media coverage surrounding the Jackson State shootings, as well as its effect on the event's place in the historical narrative.

Journalism historian Rodger Streitmatter observes the media's ability to influence the construction of historical narratives. Streitmatter asserts the media's tendency to "ignore or malign minorities," and calls this a formative characteristic of the news organizations that have contributed to the American historical narrative.¹⁹ By adhering to the techniques outlined by Streitmatter, news outlets contribute to the construction and maintenance of racially prejudiced ideals. This study uses news coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* as evidence to support Streitmatter's assessment.

In her discussion of the forgotten memory of the Jackson State shootings, Heather McGeorge comments on the limited scholarship surrounding the incident, stressing the tendency to "over generalize the protests at Jackson State, wanting to explain them as *either* a reaction to the poor state of race relations in Mississippi or part of a larger student protest movement gaining momentum in the late 1960s."²⁰ McGeorge argues that the incident's absence from the historical narrative resulted from the national media's tendency to frame the shootings as a product of the Black Power movement, a period that McGeorge claims is often overlooked by historians. Indeed, an examination of activist groups such as Jackson's Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens reveals that Black Power rhetoric was visible in literature circulated by the group in the aftermath of the event, but under the surface of these statements lays a multifaceted web of social injustices that challenges the categorization of the incident as an exclusive result of either

¹⁹ Rodger Streitmatter, *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 237.

²⁰ Heather R. McGeorge, "Two Dead in Mississippi: Black Power, Vietnam, Memory, and the 1970 Jackson State Shootings" (thesis, North Carolina State University, 2012), 5-18.

the Black Power activism or antiwar sentiments, the two historical categories targeted by McGeorge.²¹

Because they occurred on the heels of the incident at Kent State, the Jackson State shootings are often linked to the student protests surrounding the military campaign in Southeast Asia. Law professor Robert O'Neil and his associates claim that framing the Jackson State shootings in racial terms undermines campus unrest seen nationwide, particularly that made visible during the "parallel occurrence" at Kent State, "where race was not a factor." From O'Neil's perspective, the trouble at both Jackson State and Kent State resides in "student resentment over public policy toward the campus" and "an abiding bitterness between students and law enforcement agencies."²²

O'Neil is misguided in his attempt to separate the problems between students and administrators from larger societal problems that stem from a racist ideology. The problems between students and Jackson State administrators were bound to the influence of Mississippi's all-white board of education. As a state college, Jackson State fell under the heavy hand of the state government, and the resources allocated to black colleges reflected the established social structure.²³ Even without considering the correlation between the Mississippi board of education and the student unrest at Jackson State, it is imprudent to exclude racial tension as a primary factor in student unrest in Jackson. The city's long history of racial turmoil played an important role in the identities of both black and white communities in Jackson.

²¹ Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 19.

²² Robert M. O'Neil, John P. Morris, and Raymond W. Mack, *No Heroes, No Villains* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), 1-2, 34.

²³ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).

Tim Spofford's 1988 *Lynch Street* contains the most comprehensive assessment of the events at Jackson State. Spofford's account targets the institutionalized racism found in Mississippi; although he acknowledges the student unrest surrounding the military campaign in Southeast Asia, his focus rests with race relations in Jackson. Spofford's book offers extensive eyewitness interviews, as well as an in-depth analysis of community and state reaction to the shootings. His work details the official reports from investigative committees, including the President's Commission on Campus Unrest and various state-led investigations.

Joy Ann Williamson sheds light on the political climate surrounding Jackson State in her study on student activism in Mississippi's black universities. Williamson's work outlines the processes by which state universities like Jackson State were governed by Mississippi's system of education, detailing how campus activists "reconceived the meaning and purpose of black colleges, and therefore, transformed them into political entities." Like other black student activists in Mississippi, those at Jackson State experienced institutional resistance to their efforts, but students at private universities like Campbell College, Tougaloo College or Rust College, endured fewer direct repercussions from the Mississippi state government. Williamson finds that student activism at Jackson State was historically less prevalent than that at private universities in Mississippi, but news coverage from liberal publications suggests growing feelings of despondency among young black activists at Jackson State.²⁴ Conservative news outlets also addressed the growing discontent among black Jacksonians, but framed the activism as a threat to white ideals.

Questions surrounding Black Power activism in Jackson at the time of the shootings undoubtedly contribute to the event's absence from national memory. The traditional civil rights

²⁴ Joy Ann. Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 9.

narrative highlights non-violent activism and relays a goal of civil equality, effectively excluding the Black Power Movement because of its episodically aggressive and militant approach, which sought a separation from white ideals in order to foster the empowerment of black Americans. Some scholars advise a reevaluation of the existing historical narrative that informs the Black Power Movement. Peniel E. Joseph proposes viewing civil rights and Black Power as two parts of a single narrative that addresses racial inequality in the postwar American landscape.²⁵ It is to a reassessment of this period that this study appeals. Regardless of its historical classification, student unrest at Jackson State activism stemmed from a racial caste system that gave whites preferential treatment, and news coverage of the event, as well as the publishing outlets themselves, shed light on this imbalance.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The individual concerns of the three chapters contained in this study are as follows: The first chapter explores the proliferation of institutionalized racism fostered by mainstream news outlets in Jackson. The second looks to social activism and the pitfalls of going against the political grain in Mississippi in an examination of press coverage from the *Kudzu*, an underground newspaper in Jackson. Lastly, the study examines non-traditional media efforts surrounding a boycott enacted by the Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, an activist group formed in response to the shootings, as well as the *Jackson Advocate*'s response to the moratorium.

The first chapter considers the strong arms of Mississippi's established social and political institutions as an influence on media coverage of the shootings. As Dan Berkowitz asserts, "news is a human construction that gains its characteristics through the social world from

²⁵ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and, 2006).

which it emerges.”²⁶ Following this model, the social, economic, and political systems to which a journalist is exposed become a part of their writing process. As a result, those models are presented to the public as journalists transfer the ideals to their respective audiences through news coverage.

Journalists who wrote for Jackson mainstream newspapers, *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, reinforced the Jim Crow principles propagated by white Mississippi culture. The Hedermans, a family that operated a media monopoly in Jackson, owned both newspapers, and they used the collective powers of these outlets to support their own agenda. Several members of the family were active in Mississippi politics; Henry H. Hederman held a position on the statewide Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning that controlled education policies in Mississippi.²⁷

This study focuses on news coverage published by the *Clarion-Ledger*. The daily newspaper published frequent commentary on the events surrounding the shootings. The tone of these reports reflects the prevailing attitudes of many white Mississippians as it defends the actions of Mississippi law enforcement and paints the students involved as dangerous revolutionaries. An analysis of *Clarion-Ledger* news coverage reveals the relationship between news media and power relations in Mississippi.

The second chapter explores the capabilities of alternative publications. *The Kudzu* offered a unique perspective on the Jackson State shootings. The underground newspaper generally covered news that related to the counterculture movement, but the newspaper’s staff perceived the shootings as an abuse of power orchestrated by the political establishment against

²⁶ Daniel A. Berkowitz, *Social Meanings of News: A Text-reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), xii.

²⁷ Robert M. O’Neil, John P. Morris, and Raymond W. Mack, *No Heroes, No Villains* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), 12.

which they rebelled. The *Kudzu*'s coverage highlighted the missteps of the law enforcement bodies involved in the shootings. It aimed to damage the reputation of a political system that resisted opposition with brute force, and the establishment targeted the *Kudzu* and its staff on several occasions.

The chapter studies the interactions between the *Kudzu* staff, the Mississippi political establishment, and Jackson's mainstream media outlets. For the duration of its four-year publication schedule, the *Kudzu* endured harassment from the Hederman press. Its staffers were regularly targeted by local law enforcement, and the publication suffered as a result. The *Kudzu*'s story offers insight to the lengths to which the Mississippi establishment went to dampen negative perceptions of the state's involvement in the Jackson State shootings.

The study's third chapter examines the rhetoric of the *Jackson Advocate*, as well as literature distributed by the Committee of Concerned Students in the wake of the shootings. News coverage from the *Jackson Advocate* is widely criticized for its gradualist rhetoric. The publication's limited amount of coverage highlights the difficulties of maintaining a black publication in an environment dominated by white publishers and white power holders. Adversely, an analysis of the messages communicated through flyer distribution suggests that alternative communication methods possess the ability to influence the public.

Additionally, this chapter looks closely at the limitations of alternative mass communication efforts such as newsletters and flyer distribution. Because black media outlets like the *Jackson Advocate* succumbed to pressures from Mississippi's white power structure, activists adopted nontraditional communication methods to relay information. Following the shootings, protestors employed these tactics to organize a boycott of white businesses in Jackson. Conservative publications in Jackson rejected the boycott, as did the *Jackson Advocate*. An

examination of published responses to the boycott, specifically those from the *Jackson Advocate*, reveals a complex narrative that extends beyond the established racial binaries.

The alternating viewpoints found in the media coverage are indicative of the editorial leanings of each newspaper, as well those of each newspaper's respective readership. Although the news media contributed to the inability to reach a consensus of what occurred on the Jackson State campus, the accounts offer opportunities to examine the sociopolitical milieu that produced the event. While they may be missing from the dominant historical narrative, the seeds from which history sprouts lay dormant in dusty archives and microfilm storage cabinets, waiting to further illuminate the social constructions that shaped today's Mississippi.

CHAPTER ONE

POWER AND THE PRESS: *CLARION-LEDGER* COVERAGE OF THE JACKSON STATE
SHOOTINGS

Residents of Jackson, Mississippi, saw their city erupt in activity during the Civil Rights Movement. As the Movement grew, Mississippi conservatives struggled to maintain the established order of power in their home state. Opponents of civil equality used social status and political clout to preserve the segregationist ideals that shaped the state's social hierarchy. Civic groups such as Citizens Councils and the state-supported Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission worked toward this goal, while groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) emerged to aid civil rights efforts.

As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, activist numbers increased, but so did the numbers of oppositionist organizations. Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Robert B. Patterson, a World War II veteran and plantation manager, arranged a private meeting with white leaders in Indianola, Mississippi, to form the first white Citizens' Council. The organization aimed to protect the interests of the white power structure in Mississippi, and it adopted resistance to school desegregation efforts as its initial political platform. The Citizens' Councils received support from public officials and business leaders throughout the South, and the collective influence of the members proved to be a strong adversary for social progressives.²⁸

²⁸ Charles Reagan Wilson and William R. Ferris, *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 203.

By 1955, the South held more than 160 chapters of the Citizens' Council, and Mississippi led membership numbers.²⁹ Little in the state remained free from the influence of the Citizens' Councils; Jackson's Hederman family, owners of *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, appeared as strong supporters of the organization, and their newspapers reflected their position. Both *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* published reports of Citizens' Council meetings and gave the organization free advertising.³⁰ With the Hederman media outlets in their pockets, the Citizens' Council took its agenda to conservative audiences across Mississippi.

In 1956, Mississippi adopted its own pro-segregation organization. Formed under the guise of maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of Mississippi, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission aimed to "do and perform any and all acts deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states . . ." from "encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof."³¹ From 1956 to 1973, the Sovereignty Commission conducted investigations of suspected civil rights activists and sympathizers, both black and white. The commission worked in conjunction with the Citizens' Council to promote Confederate ideals, even contributing funds

²⁹ Juan González and Joseph Torres, *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* (London: Verso, 2011), 292.

³⁰ Valerie Wells, "Jackson Free Press," News Wars: The Rise and Fall of The Clarion-Ledger, September 7, 2011, accessed March 01, 2014, <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2011/sep/07/news-wars-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-clarion-ledger/>.

³¹ "Sovereignty Commission Online," Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Agency History, accessed March 01, 2014, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/scagencycasehistory.php.

to the Citizens' Council periodically, and this partnership effectively established the Citizens' Council as an arm of the state.³²

Historian James W. Silver outlined the wide reach of these organizations. "Even for the average citizen, patriotic societies make up an integral part of his social life," writes Silver. "It is in the life of these organizations, in the accounts in the press, and in the common routines of political oratory that the romanticism of the Old South as well as the cult of the Confederacy flourish – always renewed by bitter stories of Reconstruction."³³ Silver's assessment supports the notion that the Mississippi press wielded a considerable amount of power, linking media accounts to the proliferation of Jim Crow culture.

These organizations worked to protect Mississippi sovereignty, and in the process they created an immense distrust of the federal government. "The *Jackson Daily News* wrote that "damned few Mississippians believe anything they see or hear on a national newscast anymore."³⁴ This distrust of national news media multiplies the effects of local news coverage from outlets such as *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*. If the Mississippi majority placed little faith in the national news, the responsibility of local news media grew exponentially.

Despite Mississippi's efforts to distance itself from federal influence and establish autonomy, the state failed to unite its own people, and the color lines were especially strong in Jackson. Located at the foot of rich, Delta farmland, the capitol city is divided by three counties in Mississippi. The period following Reconstruction ushered in various Jim Crow laws that strengthened the economic and political control of whites in Jackson and throughout the South.

³² James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

During this time, Mississippi isolated itself from federal influence and bred what Silver calls a “closed society.”³⁵

In 1970, African-Americans made up 40 percent of the city’s 154,000 people.³⁶ Although almost half of its population was black, white elites dominated political arenas and held legislative control in Jackson. The racial divide extended beyond politics, as poor levels of education and limited earning potential perpetuated a cycle of poverty among African-Americans. In 1970, the average African-American family earned \$2,856 - less than half of the \$6, 696 median income reported by Jackson’s white families.³⁷ The economic disparity in Jackson echoed the antebellum system that placed whites at the top of a racial caste system and blacks at its bottom.

The May 1970 shootings at Jackson State were not the first instance in which law enforcement and protestors met in a violent clash on Lynch Street. The street connected the white suburbs of west Jackson to the city’s business district, so white motorists frequented the street as they traveled from home to work. Lynch Street divided the Jackson State campus and continued on through a neighborhood where black Jacksonians lived and worked. In a city where racial tensions ran high, both black and white residents regularly traveled Lynch Street, and the area near Jackson State was the location of racially charged incidents on several occasions.

In June 1963, civil rights activist Medgar Evers was shot dead on his front lawn in Jackson. Upon receiving news that Evers had been shot, demonstrators gathered at the Masonic

³⁵ Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 44-45.

³⁶ "State Population," in *1970 Census of Population. Characteristics of the Population*. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1973), 50.

³⁷ "Statewide Income." In *1970 Census of Population. Characteristics of the Population*. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1973), 55.

Temple on Lynch Street, where they planned a march in response to the attack. As law enforcement waited outside, a group of more than 200 people marched from the Masonic Temple and onto Lynch Street. Jackson policemen and Mississippi highway patrolmen met demonstrators with guns and clubs, forcing protestors into city garbage trucks and placing them into livestock pens on the state fairgrounds.³⁸ Law enforcement exercised their state-designated authority to disrupt the demonstration, but the march appeared to strengthen activists' conviction and resolve, and the struggle for egalitarianism pressed on.

Less than a year later, Jackson policemen opened fire on a group of black demonstrators, injuring three people, two of whom were Jackson State students.³⁹ The trouble began when Mamie Ballard, a Jackson State student, was hit by a car in front of Alexander Hall on Lynch Street. Ballard suffered a broken leg from the incident, and students took notice when the police allowed the driver of the car, a white man, to leave the scene. After a basketball game that evening, students blocked traffic on Lynch Street near Alexander Hall, throwing bottles and bricks at white motorists on the road. Police attempted to disburse the group, but demonstrators continued throwing debris at the officers. Policemen responded by firing their shotguns, first into the air, and next into the crowd of protestors. None died as a result of the gunshots, but three local youth were treated for injuries at Jackson hospitals. Despite no reported injuries to police officers, the city's mainstream media named "sniper fire" as the reason for the gunfire on Lynch Street that night.⁴⁰

On May 11, 1967, Jackson police shot Benjamin Brown in the back as he observed a protest near the Jackson State campus. After Brown was shot, police again opened fire on a

³⁸ John R. Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism*, (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 187-189.

³⁹ "Interview with Gregory Haywood," interview by Tim Spofford, August 17, 1981.

⁴⁰ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 13.

group of students outside Alexander Hall, the same area where James Earl Green and Joseph Gibbs were killed in May 1970.⁴¹ Brown's death would not be the last civilian casualty at the hands of Mississippi police, or even the last death from police fire near the Jackson State campus. In the eyes of black Jacksonians, one thing was clear: "when the police guns [went] off, almost invariably it [was] blacks who die or suffer wounds."⁴²

Conservative news outlets portrayed these events with narratives familiar to Mississippians. *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* condemned the actions of protestors and praised the ability and sacrifice of law enforcement. In their coverage, these publications served the agendas of the state. Their news reports glorified the Mississippi social system and vilified those who sought to change it, in the process influencing public opinion and ultimately contributing to the ways in which the events are remembered.

The media impact of economic and political institutions is perhaps no better exemplified than in the case of Jackson's own media moguls, the Hedermans, a family that held enormous influence in Mississippi economics and politics. Brothers Robert and Tom Hederman purchased *The Clarion-Ledger* from their cousin in 1920, and they used the newspaper as a tool to preserve the established socioeconomic hierarchy. The family saw opportunity in a media monopoly, and it worked to accomplish just that, eventually controlling a media corporation that operated two Jackson newspapers, *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*; another Mississippi daily, the *Hattiesburg American*; a local radio station; and WJTV, a Jackson television station.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 16.

⁴² Bill Minor, *Eyes on Mississippi: A Fifty-year Chronicle of Change* (Jackson, MS: J. Prichard Morris Books, 2001), 252.

⁴³ Juan González and Joseph Torres, *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* (London: Verso, 2011), 292.

In Jackson, the Hederman name was synonymous with three things: money, power, and social status. By the mid-20th century, a new generation of Hedermans held control of the family's media empire. They rubbed elbows with white businessmen and politicians, including Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson, Sr. and the family of U.S. Senator James Eastland. In their civil rights opus, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff reported a rumor that the Hederman family may have been partially responsible for the election of Eastland, a well-known supporter of segregation who served as the liaison between Washington D.C., and Jackson, Mississippi, during the FBI's investigation of the Jackson State shootings.⁴⁴

The Hedermans held active roles in the Jackson First Baptist Church, another Jackson institution that supported racist agendas. Located across the street from the state capitol, the First Baptist Church occupied more than a city block in downtown Jackson, and it was accurately called the most powerful religious institution in the state. Many Jackson social and political elites attended the church, including Ross Barnett, the Mississippi governor who blocked James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi in 1962. With such strong personal and professional connections, the Hedermans knew few limits in Jackson.

While the Hederman family was known throughout Mississippi for its social and economic achievements, the family's press outlets were considerably less celebrated on a national level. Writers frequently cited the newspapers' journalistic failures. Roberts and Klibanoff named *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* as "the worst major-city newspapers in the South . . . because they allowed their zealotry to dictate the scope, depth, tone,

⁴⁴ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 83.

and tilt of their coverage.”⁴⁵ In an interview with PBS correspondent Terence Smith, former *Clarion-Ledger* columnist John Hammack recalled the newspaper’s policies surrounding integration and civil rights reports:

The reporters here were not permitted to cover the racial disturbances and write stories about it because the editorial position was that we were not going to give information about these terrible things that were happening. So what we reporters did was to go out and cover the stories, come back and feed the information to the Associated Press, who would put it out under an AP credit, and the stories would be published in the paper. And if a question were ever raised about it, the official word was, that's that liberal AP that's turning out those stories. Those are not our guys writing that.

Hammack attacked the newspaper’s editorial writing. “They had some rabid segregationist editorials,” he said. “The newspaper then was basically a political tool. And it set a pace. It fulfilled, not necessarily an expectation, but a need of the power structure. It was part of the power structure.”⁴⁶ Hodding Carter, III, longtime editor of the *Delta-Democrat Times*, a liberal newspaper published in Greenville, Mississippi, expressed similar sentiments in an interview with Kathy Lally of the *Baltimore Sun*. “The Hedermans were to segregation what Joseph Goebbels was to Hitler,” said Carter. “They were cheerleaders and chief propagandists, dishonest and racist. They helped shape as well as reflect a philosophy which was, at its core, as undemocratic and immoral as any extant.”⁴⁷

Following the 1970 shootings at JSC, Mississippi’s state institutions worked hard to deflect blame from law enforcement bodies, instead targeting the student population by declaring

⁴⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁶ “Pursuing the Past: Interview with John Hammack,” interview by Terence Smith, PBS Newshour, April 18, 2002, accessed January 13, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june02/hammack_04-18.html.

⁴⁷ Kathy Lally, “A Journey From Racism to Reason,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 5, 1997, accessed February 20, 2013, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1997-01-05/news/1997005097_1_rea-hederman-clarion-ledger-mississippi.

that the policemen opened fire in response to sniper fire from Alexander Hall.⁴⁸ The state failed to cooperate with federal investigations of the incident as it launched separate inquiries that accomplished nothing short of vilifying the JSC student body and those who supported it in the aftermath of the event, and the Hederman publications offered their services in relaying the state's position to the people. News coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* contributed to the shaping of a narrative that painted law enforcement officials as heroes who worked tirelessly to protect the citizens of Jackson from a population of dangerous students who threatened to shake the foundation of Mississippi's caste system.

An analysis of newspaper coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger* illustrates the interdependency of economic, political, and social institutions in Jackson and the representations offered by Hederman media outlets. The cultural ideals fostered by social organizations prospered with help from *The Clarion-Ledger*, and the newspaper's participation played a role in the historical development of events such as the Jackson State shootings. Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis provides a framework by which these relationships may be analyzed. His model targets three inter-related processes that are linked to three methods of discourse analysis. First, Fairclough provides a description of the chosen text, in this case, press coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger*. Second, he looks toward the processes by which the text is produced. Here, this study looks toward the editorial leanings of the Hederman family, who held decisive control of the accounts published in *The Clarion-Ledger*. Finally, Fairclough performs a social analysis that offers an explanation for the processes that produced the isolated text. This approach considers the journalistic methods employed by the newspaper, including linguistic analysis and article placement, but it also necessitates an exploration of the historical contexts

⁴⁸ George Whittington, "Volley Followed Shots From Window - Williams," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), June 5, 1970.

surrounding the texts. The examination in this chapter provides clues to how the social institutions named in this study attempted to shape understandings of the event.⁴⁹

THE CLARION-LEDGER REPORTS

On the morning after the Jackson State shootings, newspaper readers faced grim reports of yet another violent campus protest. *Clarion-Ledger* coverage relied heavily on statements from Jackson's white civic leaders and local government officials, ignoring the perspective of black Jacksonians. The newspaper's May 15 headline read, "Vast Force Moved Into J-State Area," and below it, the subhead, "Ambuances [*sic*] Rolling as Shots Reported."⁵⁰ The article, written by staff writer George Whittington, reported, "all hell has busted loose" on the Jackson State campus. Whittington included details about black students' rumored attempts to take over heavy construction equipment and burn down an ROTC building on campus. He validated police actions by portraying student demonstrators as dangerous. According to Whittington, an "officer on duty" disputed claims of firecracker disturbances on the JSC campus in the evening of May 14, saying, "Those were pistols. I know. I took one off one student." While the officer may have confiscated a firearm from a student, his statement did not negate the possibility of a firecracker detonation. However, Whittington used the officer's statement as a tool to cast the students in an unfavorable light.

The story's lead acknowledged shots being fired, but never named Mississippi police as those responsible for gunfire, instead leaving the account open to interpretation for *Clarion-Ledger* readers. The absence of assigning blame for shotgun blasts paled in comparison to the author's neglect of the story's most vital fact. Whittington failed to mention that police fire

⁴⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: E. Arnold, 1995).

⁵⁰ George Whittington, "Vast Force Moved Into J-State Area," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 15, 1970.

struck Jackson State students, and his article contained no information surrounding the deaths of Phillip L. Gibbs and James Earl Green.⁵¹

In the days that followed, a recognizable narrative unfolded in the pages of *The Clarion-Ledger*. The newspaper held its usual position defending local police and government actions. It sourced its information from the mouths of police officers and local government officials, and when statements from black Jacksonians did appear, they were placed to support negative depictions of Jackson State students and other civil rights activists.

As John Hammack recalled, *The Clarion-Ledger* used *Associated Press* articles to report information that drifted from the newspaper's editorial position.⁵² It is important to note that while *Clarion-Ledger* writers were not responsible for the content in *AP* articles, the editorial staff retained control over headlines. Employing clever wording in newspaper headlines allowed *The Clarion-Ledger* to insert editorial commentary on top of news coverage that potentially strayed from the newspaper's agenda.

As investigations of the shootings began, Jackson Mayor Russell Davis appointed a biracial panel of attorneys to examine the incident. The committee held no legal power, but operated as a local authority on the events. The panel aimed to discover whether or not law officers fired their weapons in response to sniper fire, and they also sought to determine which law enforcement body had fired the shots in front of Alexander Hall. The Mississippi Highway Patrol refused to cooperate with the committee's investigation, but Jackson police spoke to the panel. They interviewed five Jackson police officers. Three officers denied seeing any evidence of a sniper, while two others claimed to have witnessed sniper fire. The two officers who

⁵¹ George Whittington, "Ambulances [sic] Rolling As Shots Reported," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 15, 1970.

⁵² Terence Smith, "Extended Interview: John Hammack," PBS, accessed February 6, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june02/hammack_04-18.html.

observed sniper fire were found to have been inside a military tank at the time of the shootings. This development should have invalidated their eyewitness testimony, but the local government accepted police testimony and began citing sniper fire as the mechanism that initiated police fire.⁵³

The Clarion-Ledger published information surrounding the bi-racial committee on May 16. The front-page headline read, "Mayor Names Bi-racial Panel to Probe Deaths." The headline suggested that local government attempted to address the needs of Jackson's black community, but the subhead below, which read, "Sniping Preceded Police," conflicted with the seemingly sympathetic headline.⁵⁴

The story's lead opened with Mayor Russell Davis' appointment of "a five-man committee of attorneys to investigate Jackson State College disorder that ended in two deaths and nine injuries." This was the first time that *The Clarion-Ledger* acknowledged the deaths. The victims remained nameless to readers until more than 25 paragraphs into the story, where Whittington listed the names and ages of Gibbs and Green as a side note in a section detailing an investigation launched by Chief Pierce and the Mississippi Highway Patrol.

Whittington's fifth paragraph included a statement from Mayor Davis in which he acknowledged the supposed presence of a sniper. "The reports that I have received up until this time indicate that prior to the heavy volley of fire from the riot control detachment, there was sniper fire from the dormitory and from the opposite side of the street," said Davis. This statement not only supported police assertions that sniper fire initiated the response from police forces, it potentially served as a way to claim that Green, who was found across the street from

⁵³ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 91-98.

⁵⁴ George Whittington, "Sniping Preceded Police." *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 16, 1970.

the dormitory, could have died as a result of sniper fire, not from police fire. Some form of the word, “sniper,” is found eight times within the article, effectively removing blame from law enforcement, and instead painting the shootings as a result of disruptive student rioters.

Whittington continued widening the gap between black Jackson and white Jackson by writing that Jackson State’s president, Dr. John Peoples, “vows vengeance” for the deaths and injuries caused by police fire. “We have gone through a night of agony unparalleled in the history of Jackson State,” said Peoples. “We have witnessed two of our brethren slain wantonly and determinedly. This will not go unavenged.”⁵⁵ This statement put Dr. Peoples and others who supported an investigation of police actions in opposition to those who approved of the methods used by law enforcement. The division of black and white Jacksonians supported the structure of social system, separating black residents from their white peers.

Clarion-Ledger editors placed Whittington’s article adjacent to an *Associated Press* report concerning a raid in which police killed two Black Panther leaders and arrested seven. “Panther Probe is Deadlock,” detailed arrestees’ refusal to testify before a federal grand jury “on ground that the jury was not formed of their peers.”⁵⁶ The jury commented, “It is a sad fact of our society that such groups can transform such issues into donations, sympathy, and membership without ever submitting to impartial fact-finding by anyone.” The placement of the *AP* report informed Whittington’s article through its negative portrayal of black activists. “Panther Probe is Deadlock,” declared that the “short answer is that revolutionary groups simply do not want the legal system to work.” This statement simultaneously questioned the motives of

⁵⁵ Whittington, “Sniping Preceded Police.”

⁵⁶ Associated Press, “Panther Probe Is Deadlock,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 16, 1970.

black activists and damaged possibilities for community support of the bi-racial panel appointed to investigate the Jackson State shootings.

The Clarion-Ledger often used *AP* articles that supported the editorial position of the Jackson newspaper. The *AP*'s reputation as an objective and independent news source served *Clarion-Ledger* editors well.⁵⁷ If readers found fault with the message of an *AP* article, *The Clarion-Ledger* could easily skirt responsibility for the content. If *AP* coverage echoed that of *The Clarion-Ledger*, the latter gained points for objective reporting.

The Clarion-Ledger placed an *AP* article below Whittington's "Sniper." The article detailed a press conference held by Mississippi's NAACP chapter at 4:00 p.m. on May 15, 1970. Alex Waites, the NAACP field secretary for Mississippi, addressed the crowd during the press conference, denouncing the police actions as "murder."⁵⁸ He went on to call for a special biracial committee to investigate the incident at Jackson State.⁵⁹ Waites' statement suggested that the appointment of the bi-racial investigative panel stems from requests made by black activists, and not from Jackson's political leaders. This report, as well as "Panther Probe is Deadlock," removed responsibility for dissenting reports from *Clarion-Ledger* writers and editors, instead placing ownership with the *AP*. These editorial choices contributed to the isolation of Mississippians by drawing noticeable lines between the perspectives of local journalists and those writing for a national audience.

In the weeks following the shootings, black Jacksonians struggled to reconcile the tragedy. Black Jackson residents exercised their power in a demonstration that hit white Jackson

⁵⁷ "Associated Press History," Associated Press, accessed March 02, 2014, <http://www.ap.org/company/history/ap-history>.

⁵⁸ Associated Press, "Jackson State Deaths 'Murder,' NAACP Official Waites Declares," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 16, 1970.

⁵⁹ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 88-89.

elites where it hurt – in their pocketbooks. Organizers began a boycott of white businesses in the city, ceasing purchases at white-owned businesses on Capitol Street and North Farish Street.⁶⁰

The Clarion-Ledger responded to the boycott, employing familiar scare tactics in a negative portrayal of activist efforts. These efforts, as well as others condemning black activism, appealed to Rodger Streitmatter's observations on the media's ability to mold public opinion. Streitmatter targeted the media's tendency to "ignore or malign minorities," calling this a ubiquitous characteristic of news organizations.⁶¹ *The Clarion-Ledger* was especially guilty of misrepresenting the interests of minorities, as evidenced by the ways in which they reported the Jackson State shootings.

On May 22, 1970, the newspaper published two side-by-side articles that detailed the introduction of law enforcement weaponry as protection against, in the words of Mayor Davis, "any eventuality that might arise" during the selective buying program.⁶² In his second paragraph, Whittington quoted a "veteran detective" who called the fire bombings of white businesses part of the "damndest campaign of fear I have ever seen." The article reported eight incidents in which white businesses received fire damage. The information in this report served two purposes. First, it labeled blacks in Jackson as dangerous criminals. Second, it created a sense of security among whites by assuring them that their local government is taking all necessary measures to ensure that law enforcement protects Jackson residents.

An *AP* article on the same page addressed the disturbances in the words of Mississippi's governor. "Every means available to the state of Mississippi will be employed to make certain

⁶⁰ "Flyer: Selective Buying Boycott," Mississippi Digital Library, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://collections.msdl.org/cdm/ref/collection/jsu/id/122>.

⁶¹ Rodger Streitmatter, *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 237.

⁶² George Whittington, "Tough New Tear Gas, Guns Issued: Jackson State," *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 22, 1970.

that all people of Mississippi will be able to live in their homes free from the fear of having their homes burned by some Molotov cocktail or their businesses destroyed,” said Williams. “I hope that the people of Mississippi – neither black nor white – will not permit themselves to be led further by the pied pipers of anarchy and insurrection.”⁶³ Williams’ statement emitted a subtle warning that the state of Mississippi did not tolerate dissent. The governor urged residents of Jackson to “exercise restraint” in hopes that the city would return to a sense of normalcy.

Black Mississippians mourned the loss of the two students, and the nation watched as funerals and memorial services honored the lives of Gibbs and Green. *The Clarion-Ledger* reported the services in an article published on May 18, 1970. Instead of paying homage to the fallen students, Whittington appealed to the constructed fears of *Clarion-Ledger* readers. The article’s subhead, “Negro Groups Hold Memorial Services,” fell under a headline that read, “Federal Agents Swarm Probing Deaths at JSC.” Whittington began, “Jackson swarmed Sunday with government agents and Negro civil rightists as some 3,000 persons gathered for at least two memorial services, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation prepared for a visit to the city by U.S. Atty. Gen. John. N. Mitchell Monday.”⁶⁴ Whittington appealed to Mississippians’ distrust of both civil rights activists and the federal government as he placed the two side-by-side in his lead sentence. He went on to paint the memorial services as unorganized and chaotic.

The article provided a detailed account of a memorial service held at Blair Street Church in which Charles Evers, the mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, and a brother to slain civil rights activist, Medgar Evers, addressed a crowd of approximately 250 people, calling for “rallies nightly in Jackson.” Whittington equated black demonstrators with Nazis as he employed scare

⁶³ Associated Press, "Tough New Tear Gas, Guns Issued: Governor," *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 22, 1970.

⁶⁴ George Whittington, "Federal Agents Swarm Probing Deaths at JSC," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 18, 1970.

tactics in an attempt to position *Clarion-Ledger* readers against black demonstrators. He continued his criticism of Evers throughout the article. “As he [Evers] led his group onto the JSC campus a small group of young Negroes greeted them with clenched fists, raised Nazi-fashion in the Black Power Salute,” wrote Whittington. He closed the section with a report of police enforcing a “protective plan” that closed Lynch Street as crowds grew “in response to a call from Evers.”

Although much of Whittington’s article focused on the perceived threat posed by the gathering, he offered some comfort to his readers by ensuring them that federal investigators would be shadowed by the Hinds County Grand Jury appointed by District Attorney Jack Travis. This action came in response to requests that no visitors be allowed access to Alexander Hall until the FBI’s investigators “could comb it.” The monitored inspection illustrated a lack of trust between local and federal investigators.

The funeral service for Green drew press attention from a wide range of newspapers, including *The Clarion-Ledger*. True to form, Whittington poised the funeral procession as a danger to Jackson’s white community. *The Clarion-Ledger*’s May 23 headline read, “Youth’s Funeral Held; Police Hope for Calm.” The headline suggested possible disturbances connected with Green’s funeral. Under the headline, the newspaper published two front-page articles on the funeral. Whittington’s article, with the subhead, “Tension Eases Slightly,” and James H. Downey’s *AP* article with the subhead, “President Wires Sympathy to Family,” presented an exchange between a local writer and a national journalist, again appealing to divisions between local and national news outlets.

Whittington reported that the number of attendees fell short of the 10,000 people expected, instead drawing an estimated crowd of 4,000 after “civil rights and Negro leaders used

the occasion to try to build interest toward a fever pitch.” The article cited “disclosure that the police had received a full supply of antiriot equipment” as a contributing factor to the decreased number of funeral attendees. According to Whittington, the anticipated number of funeral-goers caused anxiety among Jackson residents. He reported that tension eased as the funeral ended at 3:30 p.m. and “police announced an ‘all clear’ at the cemetery at four,” but an “all-night prayer vigil called for some watchfulness,” and Jackson police, the Highway Patrol, the National Guard, and some Justice Department agents “maintained a command post” until the vigil ended. Whittington portrayed the prayerful gathering as a danger to white businessmen who expected the prayer warriors to instigate “firebombings.”⁶⁵

Downey’s article answered Whittington’s frightened call with numbers. As mentioned above, Williams put Mississippi highway patrolmen on alert during the funeral, but instead of referencing local police forces, Downey focused on the large number of National Guard troops mobilized by Williams.

The article continued with a statement from Charles Evers. In response to Governor Williams’ criticism of national politicians who extended help and condolences to the families of Gibbs, Green, and other victims in the shootings, Evers said, “Regardless of what the state leaders said, you are welcome here.”⁶⁶ Evers’ statement alluded to the division between Mississippi state government and the federal government, and the seasoned activist knowingly took advantage of the estranged relationship. Although race relations in the northern states were far from perfect in 1970, civil rights activists valued the North’s new commitment to aiding the civil rights cause. If nothing else, Northerners sought to set themselves in opposition to the

⁶⁵ George Whittington, "Youth's Funeral Held; Police Hope for Calm: Tension Eases Slightly," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 23, 1970.

⁶⁶ James H. Downey, "Youth's Funeral Held; Police Hope For Calm: President Wires Sympathy to Family," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), May 23, 1970.

South. In “Tension Eases Slightly,” Whittington remarked on the interaction between national government and civil rights activists, but his criticism fell on politicians who, he said, sought “reelection in states with pivotal Negro votes.” Whittington provided a full list of politicians, government officials, and celebrities who attended the funeral, arming white Jackson with more information than it could possibly use to breed hate and resentment toward outsiders.⁶⁷

Downey also referenced Evers’ address. “How long, O Lord, will our white brothers continue to destroy us?” asked Evers. “It can’t be any longer. It must stop now.” Statements such as this incited fear among white Jacksonians who viewed civil equality as a detrimental crack in the armor of their valued hierarchical system. Downey questioned the motives of Williams, writing that Senator Charles H. Percy “failed to understand why Governor Williams had used the funeral to make a show of force.” “Black students said they thought the Governor was trying to provoke an incident so that additional police force could be used against Negroes,” wrote Downey.

Phillip Gibbs’ funeral was held in his hometown of Ripley, Mississippi. Because of the service’s size and a lack of civil rights activity surrounding the interment, it fell in the shadow of Green’s funeral. The small ceremony for Gibbs received only a brief mention in Whittington’s “Tension Eases Slightly,” but *The Clarion-Ledger* later took notice of Gibbs after toxicology reports showed his blood alcohol level to be over the legal limit at the time of his death.⁶⁸

After Gibbs and Green were laid to rest, Mississippians turned their eyes toward investigations of the shootings. In a June 4 television address, Governor Williams attempted to ease citizen concerns about the ongoing investigations. Williams and those under his authority

⁶⁷ George Whittington, “Youth’s Funeral Held; Police Hope for Calm: Tension Eases Slightly,” *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 23, 1970.

⁶⁸ Associated Press, “J-State Victim Drunk,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), June 5, 1970.

had refrained from making a public statement on the shootings because they did not wish to be “put in a position of pre-judging the case.”⁶⁹ At the beginning of his speech, Williams seized an opportunity to publicly condemn the actions of two unnamed United States senators in regard to the nation’s response to the shootings. He spoke out against the national press and suggested that they were “highly biased” toward the students. He also questioned the motives of Civil Rights leaders who “make speeches, pass the collection plate, and disappear.”⁷⁰ After completing his personal attack, Williams gave lengthy praise to the Mississippi Highway Patrol and the Jackson Police Department, both of which, at that time, were believed to have opened fire on the group of students.

Williams attempted to generate public approval of the forces by discussing their accomplishments in regard to formal education and training hours. Members of the Jackson Police Department even engaged in riot control training and learned skills that seem to have left them immediately following their training. Williams’ comments supported the validity of sniper fire claims made by law enforcement officers, and despite evidence suggesting otherwise, the governor presented those claims as factual. *The Clarion-Ledger* reported on Williams’ television address on June 5, 1970. Whittington quoted Williams as saying, “At approximately 12:05 a.m., the first gunfire openly directed at officers came from the third floor stairwell of the women’s dormitory. The glass in this window had already been broken out before the officers arrived, and the curtains tied up in the middle.”⁷¹

The President’s Commission on Campus Unrest later found Williams’ assertion to be incorrect. FBI investigators found no proof that shots had been fired from anywhere in

⁶⁹ Williams, “Jackson State.”

⁷⁰ John Bell Williams (address, Jackson, MS, June 04, 1970).

⁷¹ George Whittington, "Volley Followed Shots From Window - Williams," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), June 5, 1970.

Alexander Hall. Federal agents also found that “every bullet mark which they could identify in every broken window and in every defaced panel was made by a bullet or pellet fired from outside the building.”⁷² Again, *The Clarion-Ledger* discounted the findings of federal investigators in favor of information that supported the agenda of Mississippi’s state government.

A real problem with assigning blame is the lack of physical evidence supporting either side’s claims. The police officers quickly gathered their spent shotgun shells. The law enforcement bodies did little to encourage accountability, instead pointing fingers toward the group of students. The incident was a breeding ground for an outpouring of fear from both sides of the community. To the black community, the Jackson State shootings were yet another exercise of power from Mississippi’s white elites, and the city’s white residents saw the incident as a threat to life as they knew it.

A number of federal and state investigations launched after the shootings. Both a federal grand jury and a Hinds County grand jury were summoned to probe the shootings. The respective juries reached different conclusions concerning the sequence of events at Jackson State. The state investigation confirmed the presence of a sniper and found law enforcement’s response to be justified.⁷³ Alternatively, the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest followed the assertion of the federal grand jury, naming claims of sniper fire as unproven. The FBI’s investigation found no evidence of small arms fire in the area around Alexander Hall.⁷⁴

Both juries refused to indict the officers for the shootings and the resulting deaths. Although it appeared that no officers would be held responsible by a criminal court, black

⁷² *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, 443.

⁷³ "Jackson State Shootings Called Justified by County Grand Jury," *New York Times*, July 30, 1970.

⁷⁴ *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, 442-443.

Jackson citizens made a final attempt to seek justice for the victims. In February 1972, litigation began in a civil trial that sought damages for the shooting victims and their families. The all-white jury ruled in favor of the officers.⁷⁵

The Jackson State shootings' absence from the dominant historical narrative is multiplied by the federal and state legal systems' failure to secure justice for the victims and their families. Although the victims' appeal for accountability may have failed, the possibility remains that their legacy may offer opportunities for greater understandings of the event.

Forming a holistic narrative of events requires the study of multiple perspectives, and news coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger* offers a close look at the perceptions of Mississippi's establishment, as well as the social and political institutions that motivated the reports. While this perspective may not lend itself to transparency, it nonetheless served a primary role in the event's history. The messages of *Clarion-Ledger* news reports remind from which we've come, and their existence is valuable in that we may employ them in a measure of social progress.

⁷⁵ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 154-174.

CHAPTER TWO

CUTTING THE *KUDZU*: JACKSON'S UNDERGROUND PRESS

Jackson, Mississippi, rarely appears in discussions of the 1960s counterculture. The city's grassroots activism is often referenced in historical accounts of civil rights efforts, but the story of Jackson's counterculture movement remains largely untold. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, white social activists represented only a nominal portion of Jackson's population. Nonetheless, they played a role in the cultural and social evolution of the period, and the study of Jackson's counterculture offers an often-overlooked perspective of social activism in the city.

As the counterculture movement gained momentum, activists endured considerable resistance from Mississippi's conservative political and social institutions. The interaction between the two groups may be best observed in a media tug-of-war between from Jackson's mainstream press outlets, *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, and the *Kudzu*, an underground newspaper in Jackson that began publishing in 1968. *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* published frequent reports of *Kudzu* activities and regularly questioned the underground newspaper's credibility. *Kudzu* staffers fired back at their conservative counterparts, loudly proclaiming the two publications as "hate-filled Hederman propaganda."⁷⁶ The claims of all three newspapers are a testament to the tension between conservative and liberal forces in Jackson.

In the aftermath of the Jackson State shootings, the *Kudzu* offered a critical perspective that remained largely untold in the mainstream press. The newspaper's reports appealed to the

⁷⁶ "The Hederman Disease," *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), June 1970.

values of the counterculture community, including statements from student eyewitnesses and other black community leaders in its attempts to give voice to a part of Jackson's population that was often maligned in the city's mainstream news outlets. The *Kudzu* rallied behind the victims as it published responses from Mississippi student activists and black community leaders, and the newspaper issued a call for action from both Jackson's black and white communities in a detailed report on a boycott of white businesses proposed by Jackson's Committee for Concerned Students and Citizens.

A comparison of coverage from *The Clarion-Ledger*, the *Jackson Daily News*, and the *Kudzu* provides a sample of the contradictory reports that emerged from Jackson press outlets following the Jackson State shootings, and these inconsistencies reflect the volatility of the social environment in Jackson at the time of the incident. This chapter posits the conflicting media reports as an obstacle to producing a clear historical narrative of the Jackson State shootings, thereby limiting the event's inclusion into the national historical narrative.

Historical narratives that surround the Jackson State shootings attempt to place the incident as a product of two possible social concerns. While some historians place the shootings as a result of racial tensions in Mississippi, others cite the protests and subsequent shootings as a response to an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University in Ohio, during which national guardsmen shot and killed four unarmed student protestors. Scholar Heather McGeorge contends that historical production processes tend to align the Jackson State protests with the Black Power Movement, a movement that until recent years was discounted by many historians as a squandering of egalitarian efforts made by civil rights activists.⁷⁷ McGeorge's assertion could help explain the shootings' absence from the dominant historical narrative, and if the

⁷⁷ Heather R. McGeorge, "Two Dead in Mississippi: Black Power, Vietnam, Memory, and the 1970 Jackson State Shootings" (thesis, North Carolina State University, 2012).

shootings at Jackson State are neglected in the historical narrative, it stands to reason that the counterculture groups that propelled activist endeavors may also be excluded.

The counterculture's absence from the history of the Jackson State shootings illustrates narrative silencing, a process outlined by historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Trouillot proposes that within historical narratives rests "a particular bundle of silences," and the power relations that influence the historical narrative shape these "bundles". According to Trouillot, "what matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives."⁷⁸ In other words, an understanding of a dominant historical narrative relies upon a scholar's ability to consider not only the messages communicated by said histories, but also the social conditions that produced the silenced narrative. Jackson's dominant hegemony and the city's mainstream media outlets acted collusively as they suppressed the *Kudzu* narratives and replaced them with their own version of the events at Jackson State.

McGeorge employs Trouillot's processes of historical analysis in an examination of national press coverage of the Jackson State shootings. McGeorge claims that because print media sources are designed for mass consumption, they offer "valuable insight into the interpretation of the events in Jackson and how these interpretations became written into history."⁷⁹ Indeed, media accounts provide clues to audience demographics and perceptions, but McGeorge's analysis falls short of identifying a historical interpretation because the dominant historical narrative largely neglects the incident at Jackson State. This absence, or silencing, of the Jackson State narrative continues primarily because of historians' inability – or refusal – to

⁷⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 25-27.

⁷⁹ McGeorge, "Two Dead in Mississippi: Black Power, Vietnam, Memory, and the 1970 Jackson State Shootings," 81-85.

form a complete account that would enable the incident to be included in the larger movements that form the dominant historical narrative.

While McGeorge's use of Trouillot's model may not be particularly effective in outlining national opinion of the Jackson State shootings, it proves especially poignant in an analysis of the interactions between Jackson's political and social spheres and its mainstream media outlets. The Mississippi establishment's struggle to silence the *Kudzu* appears in the pages of *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*. By publishing negative accounts of *Kudzu* staffers and their work, the establishment unknowingly documented its own participation in the narrative silencing of the *Kudzu*'s representation of the Jackson State shootings.

Although the *Kudzu* published for only four years, it stands as a tangible symbol of a counterculture movement largely ignored in Mississippi's history, and *Kudzu* coverage of the Jackson State shootings lends insight to the interactions between Jackson's black community and the city's population of white activists. Although underground publications like the *Kudzu* failed to reach as much of the population as larger press outlets in Mississippi, their coverage filled a necessary function in the counterculture community. Abbie Hoffman, co-founder of the Youth International Party and recognized social and political activist, spoke on the value of the underground press. "The most valuable thing about the underground press is that it's there," said Hoffman. "It is a visible manifestation of an alternative culture."⁸⁰

Historian John McMillian offers insight to the lasting effects of alternative publications in *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America*. The counterculture's underground press occupied a unique space in media production. Contrary to the prescribed methods of mainstream media, the alternative press outlets rejected

⁸⁰ Thomas Forcade, "An Advertisement for Revolution," *Free Ranger Intertribal News Service* (New York, NY), March 16, 1970.

notions of objective reporting. “They put across forcefully opinionated accounts of events that mattered deeply to them – that grew out of their culture – and they used a language and sensibility of their own fashioning,” writes McMillian. Unlike their conservative counterparts, underground press reporters participated in the events they recorded, thereby offering valuable looks into the processes of the counterculture. McMillian postulates that the structure of the underground press outlets allowed for implementation of social ideals promoted by the counterculture. “New Leftists imbued their newspapers with an ethos that socialized the people into the Movement, fostering a spirit of mutuality among them, and raised their democratic expectations,” writes McMillian.⁸¹

The *Kudzu* grew from an activist group’s conviction that media be used for the greater good. “It all came back to my belief that information provides the fuel for progress,” says *Kudzu* co-founder, David Doggett.⁸² Doggett joined other Jackson activists to form the newspaper in 1968. For the next four years, the *Kudzu* published reports grounded in the 1960s counterculture ethos that brought sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll into the public eye.

The son of a Methodist minister, David Doggett was born and raised in Mississippi. As an adolescent, he observed the Jim Crow ideals celebrated by many white Mississippians, but his parents viewed racism as a less-than-holy attribute, so Doggett essentially escaped the dogma of Jim Crow and instead embraced the struggle for “moral progress, for freedom, equality, justice, and an end to economic disparity.”⁸³

⁸¹ John Campbell. McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4-6.

⁸² David Doggett, "The Kudzu: Birth and Death in Underground Mississippi," in *Voices from the Underground: Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 128.

⁸³ David Doggett, "The Kudzu: Birth and Death in Underground Mississippi," 123.

As a college student at Millsaps College, Doggett joined the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC). SSOC emerged as a southern arm of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an organization that sought reform in the American democratic system. SSOC was formed in 1964 by a group of white activists who saw a need for a white organizing committee in the South. According to Doggett, the organization “operated as a loosely-knit network of organizers trying to keep up with the developments in the national Movement and at the same time reach out to the most unsophisticated, provincial, and reactionary constituency in the country.”⁸⁴ SSOC’s tallest order existed not in keeping pace with the national Movement, but in communicating those ideals to the Mississippi population.

Doggett became an active member of SSOC; by the summer of 1968 he served as the group’s Mississippi organizer, a position that proved fruitful as he worked to secure funding for the *Kudzu* later that same year. While working for the *Kudzu*, Doggett subsisted on a SSOC salary of fifteen dollars per week, some of which was used to help with publishing costs of the *Kudzu*.⁸⁵ Much of the funds that supported the publication came from the pockets of *Kudzu* staffers. Doggett recalls several instances in which a member of the *Kudzu* staff worked an outside job to cover publication overhead.⁸⁶

A large part of the newspaper’s financial difficulties stemmed from its inability to sell ads to local businesses. Most Jackson business owners refused to align their companies with the left-wing publication, and those sympathetic to the cause were unwilling to buy advertising space for fear of being harassed by the local establishment.

⁸⁴ David Doggett, "Underground in Mississippi," *Southern Exposure*, Winter 1975, 89.

⁸⁵ Stephen Flinn Young, "The Kudzu: Sixties Generational Revolt - Even in Mississippi," *The Southern Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 125-129.

⁸⁶ "Interview with David Doggett," telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

The *Kudzu*'s financial troubles extended further than a lack of advertising sales. Due to a general lack of support and high printing costs, the newspaper struggled to secure a printer in Mississippi, but Doggett located a black printer in New Orleans who agreed to grant the *Kudzu* a credit line and print at a reasonable cost.⁸⁷ Most important to the agreement, the New Orleans printer "couldn't be touched by political pressure from Jackson."⁸⁸ When publication dates drew near, staffers drove the layout to New Orleans and spent the day in the city while waiting for the newspapers to be printed. The newspaper initially sold for 15 cents, with the seller keeping half of that amount. Doggett recalled that most sellers donated sales back to the *Kudzu* to help cover publication costs.⁸⁹

The *Kudzu* refrained from implementing a professional hierarchy. Instead, the staff operated as a collective, never assigning an editor or any other official positions. Doggett expounds on the democratic processes of the publication:

We decided on the content of each issue more or less by consensus. There wasn't much ideological bickering simply because we tried to let everyone involved have some space to write whatever he or she wanted. We ran a fairly typical smorgasbord of spacey hippie ramblings, rock music reviews, cartoons, comics, and straight political coverage of the war in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, labor struggles, and the New Left.

These processes worked well for the newspaper. Many writers wrote under pseudonyms, but some used their given names. Because responsibility for unsigned articles fell to the entire *Kudzu* staff, those articles were approved by consensus. The newspaper filled extra space with national articles, cartoons, and artwork from other underground papers, a method that proved successful in relaying events of the larger counterculture movement to Mississippi readers.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Stephen Flinn Young, "The Kudzu: Sixties Generational Revolt - Even in Mississippi," 128.

⁸⁸ David Doggett, "The Kudzu: Birth and Death in Underground Mississippi," 129-131.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 129-131.

⁹⁰ David Doggett, "The Kudzu: Birth and Death in Underground Mississippi," 131.

The *Kudzu* staffers were cognizant of potential roadblocks that could be enforced by Mississippi law; they refrained from printing anything that could be considered pornographic, and their “political writings were quite mild by national standards.” Despite their best efforts, Mississippi law enforcement frequently targeted *Kudzu* staff members. On average, various *Kudzu* staff members were arrested several times a month, but the charges were almost always dropped, and a loyal base of civil rights attorneys assisted with the legal needs of arrestees.⁹¹

Unfortunately, the *Kudzu*’s legal problems did not stop at the local level. The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a state-supported committee that targeted suspected civil rights activists and other perceived government dissenters, investigated the activities of *Kudzu* staff members. Over a period of more than fifteen years, the commission compiled a list of over 87,000 suspected activists, including several members of the *Kudzu* staff. Doggett’s Sovereignty Commission file includes news articles from several area newspapers in which he was mentioned, several *Kudzu* articles penned by Doggett, information on his family members, and numerous photographs identifying him.⁹² The Sovereignty Commission worked together with local and state law enforcement bodies to harass *Kudzu* staffers, but the nature of the publication made it less vulnerable to intimidation tactics.

The *Kudzu* endured pressure from state officials for the duration of its publication. In June of 1970, the Jackson Vice Squad rented an apartment next door to the *Kudzu* headquarters, a small house on Northwest Street in Jackson. An article, titled “*Kudzu* Under Siege,” documents the interaction from the perspective of *Kudzu* commune members. The report claims that the Vice Squad rented the apartment for “electronic experimentation,” which

⁹¹ David Doggett, "Underground in Mississippi," *Southern Exposure*, 90.

⁹² Sovereignty Commission Online," Mississippi Department of Archives and History, accessed March 25, 2014, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/.

included the supposed bugging of *Kudzu* property. The surveillance eventually became less severe – or at least less visible – and the newspaper continued in its normal operations.⁹³

Interference from law enforcement bodies soon extended to the federal level. In October of 1970, the *Kudzu* came under fire from the FBI. Doggett recalled several occasions in which the FBI came into *Kudzu* headquarters without a search warrant. “They always claimed that they were in hot pursuit of some national fugitive who was never anywhere close to us,” said Doggett. “They were looking for an excuse to do damage to us.” On October 26, the Jackson police raided the *Kudzu* house, actions believed to be orchestrated by the FBI. Police officers held eight *Kudzu* staffers at gunpoint in the front room of the house while they “turned the house upside down.” Police filed charges when they found a small bag of marijuana, but the charges were thrown out in court because the evidence surfaced while staffers were being held in the other room. “When they found the stuff, it was in a room that none of us were in,” said Doggett. “In fact it was in one of our file cabinets in an office. So that wasn’t sufficient evidence to hold up in court because they couldn’t pin it on any individual person, and it was thrown out.”^{94,95}

The police raid came toward the end of the *Kudzu*’s reports on the Jackson State shootings. Like other publications in Jackson, the newspaper published a series of articles on the incident, but *Kudzu* readers encountered reports vastly different than those found in mainstream newspapers. The Hederman press endorsed law enforcement actions and attempted to demonize those of students and protesters. On the other side of the coin, the *Kudzu* condemned the shootings, calling the incident the “Jackson State Massacre.” Their coverage possessed colorful

⁹³ Kudzu Commune Members, “Kudzu Under Siege,” *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), June 1970.

⁹⁴ “Interview with David Doggett,” telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

⁹⁵ David Doggett, “The Kudzu: Birth and Death in Underground Mississippi,” in *Voices from the Underground: Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 145-48.

assessments of the events and those involved in the shootings, and while this rhetoric produced engaging articles, it did little to placate conservative press outlets that claimed to strive for objectivity in journalistic writing.

The *Kudzu* never subscribed to these efforts for objectivity, instead employing language that it hoped would stimulate its readership. “We wanted to bring the printed word down off of its bourgeois intellectual pedestal,” wrote Doggett.⁹⁶ While their methods may have deviated from those used by the mainstream press, the *Kudzu* embraced certain approaches used by conventional press outlets. Both sides applied active voice, an approach that William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White “makes for forcible writing.”⁹⁷ David A. Copeland expounds on Strunk and White’s assessment, writing that journalists’ use of active voice has been used “to solve problems, address issues, and set or change [an] agenda on any level.” Writers use active voice, Copeland continues, to “shape their writings to achieve a purpose. It may be simply to inform, but often, it is to make those who read or view their work think about something, and then, perhaps seek to make changes. When writers assume this purpose, they become actively involved in the issue at hand; their voice assumes an active role in the subject.”⁹⁸ At times, the *Kudzu* used active voice appropriately, and it strengthened the force of their coverage, but more often than not, the writers employed passive voice, a common mistake made by inexperienced writers.

Scholars may also point to the subjective leanings of the newspaper as a weakness, but *Kudzu* writers wrote with conviction. They played active parts not only in the execution of their

⁹⁶ David Doggett, “Underground in Mississippi,” *Southern Exposure*, Winter 1975, 90.

⁹⁷ William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 13.

⁹⁸ David A. Copeland, *The Media’s Role in Defining the Nation: The Active Voice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 4.

writings, but also in the social progress that they championed, and this involvement is visible in the newspaper's press coverage following the Jackson State shootings.

The day after the shootings, Doggett made a photograph of Alexander Hall. The evocative black and white image presented the dormitory's shattered façade, wrecked by police fire in the early morning hours of May 15.⁹⁹ The *Kudzu* published Doggett's photograph on the front page of its May 1970 issue. Inside the newspaper, readers found several pages of articles on the shootings – the first, a “documentary account” of the incident, was a joint effort co-written by Doggett and Representative Robert Clark, at the time Mississippi's only black state congressman. The indisputable facts remained – students gathered on campus, law enforcement officers attempted to disperse students, officers opened fire, two students were killed, and twelve others were injured. These reports left little room for interpretation, and the *Kudzu*'s documentary effort proved to be the most objective piece in the issue.

⁹⁹ David Doggett, *Alexander Hall*, May 15, 1970, Jackson, MS, in *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS, 1970), 1.



Figure 2 Photograph of Alexander Hall by David Doggett

If Doggett and Clark's article held the title for most objective piece, an editorial on the next page rivaled its efforts on the subjective end. "License to Kill," written by DeGeche X, a Jackson State student activist otherwise known as Henry Thompson, targeted Mississippi's all-white Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning. The board was formed in 1910 to foster coordination among the state's public colleges. Historian David G. Sansing claims that the state attempted "to keep colleges out of politics and politics out of the colleges" by prohibiting elected officials from serving on the board, but this proved impossible as Mississippi's economic, educational, and political environments were tightly intertwined. The

Mississippi state legislature allocated the educational funding controlled by the Board of Trustees, thereby playing a primary role in the direction of the state school system.¹⁰⁰

Historian Joy Ann Williamson highlighted the board's efforts to develop agricultural programs in black colleges in an attempt to keep black Mississippians in trade services. Her work highlighted their ability to place "black administrators and faculty who would not encourage agitation against the racial hierarchy," she wrote. "White Mississippians had come to accept the higher education of blacks as inevitable but worried about the end to which blacks were educated, and powerful whites sought to monitor and direct the nature of that education away from racial agitation and toward a respect for the racial order."¹⁰¹

The board worked to keep black administrators and students in line with the state's goals for education. Because the Board of Trustees controlled the Jackson State administration, political radicalism was discouraged on campus, and as a result social activists widely considered the student body at Jackson State to be apathetic, with the exception of annual springtime disturbances that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰² Comments from Jackson residents and Jackson State students echoed a local feeling that the protests grew less from opposition to the Vietnam War and more from the social conditions of blacks in Mississippi. "They were just kids," recalled Thompson. "They knew about Martin Luther King and marching and freedom songs . . . but they didn't know very much about Vietnam."¹⁰³

Sansing's *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* demonstrates the board's influence in perpetuating subservience in black state

¹⁰⁰ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 81-82.

¹⁰¹ Joy Ann. Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 28-30.

¹⁰² "Interview with David Doggett," telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

¹⁰³ Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 32-35.

colleges. Sansing recalls the experiences of Steven Leshner, a member of The President's Commission on Campus Unrest. "A recycling of unsophisticated rural blacks through underfinanced colleges where they are taught, by people from similar circumstances, to teach yet another generation of the disadvantaged is like the hamster on an exercise wheel who races to escape but gets nowhere," said Leshner.¹⁰⁴ His assessment supports notions that Mississippi's white establishment sought to limit the black population's exposure to educational opportunity. Sansing expounds on Leshner's findings, writing, "Black college presidents were forced to serve two masters – their black constituency, who would no longer accept things as they were, and the white power structure, who would not allow black colleges to become engines of change."¹⁰⁵

Thompson's "License to Kill" article again confirmed Jackson State's perceived indifference toward activism. "Why a docile, anti-militant, and white-conforming college such as Jackson State?" he asked. "Again the adversity of the closed society spews its venom upon its struggling black counterparts."¹⁰⁶ Although Thompson himself was a Jackson State student activist, he worked primarily outside the realm of the college. He ran another underground publication, *The Gadget*, at Jackson State, but he regularly contributed to the *Kudzu* in order to ensure that his efforts reached the larger activist population outside the college.¹⁰⁷

Thompson's article posed several questions to the establishment. First, why were police on the Jackson State campus at all? Second, why did the officers, or as the article references them, "well-armed merchants of death," target the women's dormitory at Alexander Hall instead of the men's dormitory up the street where a dump truck sat aflame? The article went on to

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Leshner, "Jackson State a Year After," *New York Times Magazine*, March 21, 1971, 56.

¹⁰⁵ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 210-211.

¹⁰⁶ Degecha X, "License to Kill," editorial, *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), May 1970.

¹⁰⁷ Spofford, Lynch Street.

question the validity of state claims that sniper fire from the fourth floor of Alexander Hall initiated the barrage of bullets from law enforcement.

Thompson's article takes a clear side of the conflict, referring to the students as the "human element," while naming law enforcement as the "killer-element."¹⁰⁸ It was a combination of defamatory rhetoric and popular culture references that gave the establishment fuel to dismiss the claims of the *Kudzu*, but the true reason for the opposition rests in the *Kudzu*'s persistence in questioning the motives of authority and demanding explanations for the state's actions.

Thompson returned to his criticism of the Board of Trustees to close his article: "In general, the whole situation smells of a conspiracy not only to teach blacks to stay in their place, but also to reinforce the white man fear into the southern Negro who is not bent on independence from his white oppressor."¹⁰⁹

The *Kudzu* led the charge in documenting the black community's response to the Jackson State shootings. Unlike its conservative counterparts, *Kudzu* coverage sought the eyewitness testimony of black students and activists who participated in demonstrations following the incident. "Community Response" followed other themes found in the May issue as it criticized the Hederman press, condemned the actions of Jackson police, and detailed activist reactions from across the state of Mississippi.

No single staff member received writing credit for the "Community Response" article. Doggett commented that *Kudzu* staff members often agreed to assume joint responsibility for articles that they feared might draw amplified negative attention from the establishment. "Community Response" presented a heavy critique of Mississippi Highway patrolman, Inspector

¹⁰⁸ Degecha X, "License to Kill," editorial, *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), May 1970.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Lloyd Jones, who regularly appeared at racially charged conflicts in Jackson. Although no one was ever indicted for the 1967 shooting death of Benjamin Brown, a black man killed during a demonstration on Lynch Street, the *Kudzu* charged Jones with the young man's death. They had their own name for Jones. They called him "Goon."

The article included a statement from Gregory Antoine, a Jackson State student who witnessed the shootings. Antoine called the shootings a "blood-thirsty and trigger-happy murder." He directed blame to local and state authorities, also implicating Jones in the killings. "I accuse him of being involved in this . . . in a part of this murder," said Antoine. According to Tim Spofford, it was Jones who initiated rumors that law officers opened fire only after receiving sniper fire from Alexander Hall.¹¹⁰

Notably, the *Kudzu* grounded the article in the black community's reaction to the shootings. "Community Response" gave an account of a demonstration held on Friday, May 15, the day after the shootings. Doggett and other members of the *Kudzu* staff organized the demonstration, which drew over 150 black and white activists in Jackson, most of whom were Millsaps students and alumni. At noon, the crowd marched from Millsaps to the governor's mansion, where they were joined by students and faculty from Tougaloo College, as well as additional students from Jackson State.¹¹¹ By participating in the events they reported, the *Kudzu* staff gained special access to their subjects. Unlike Jackson's mainstream media journalists, *Kudzu* writers had personal relationships with many of the people on whom they reported, and they were directly involved in the events they recorded. This approach offered a perspective of the Jackson State shootings that conservative press outlets could not offer.

¹¹⁰ Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College*, 74.

¹¹¹ "Community Response," *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), May 1970.

JACKSON'S MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS RESPOND TO *KUDZU* COVERAGE

The *Kudzu*'s May issue did not sit well with conservatives in Jackson, and the establishment's mouthpiece, the Hederman press outlets, instigated a mud-slinging campaign that littered the pages of both the *Kudzu* and the Hederman press. Hederman-owned newspapers took the first blow on May 31, 1970. To be sure, this was neither the first nor the last time that Hederman newspapers criticized the *Kudzu*, but the May 31 issue of the *Jackson Daily News* devoted an entire article to what they called "The *Kudzu* Syndrome." *Daily News* Staff Writer, Charles B. Gordon threw an indirect jab at the *Kudzu* in his opening paragraphs as he questioned the motives of the "pretentious contention" driving the alternative press. Only later in the article did he name "a thing called *Kudzu*" as his primary target. Gordon's article provided a complete list of *Kudzu* staff members, the newspaper's address, and even the location of the company that printed the *Kudzu*, presumably to make the information accessible for anyone who wished to personally confront the staff or its associates.

Gordon acknowledged the *Kudzu*'s inventive style, giving the publication credit for coining the phrase, "Jackson State Massacre," but this did little to alter the columnist's notions about the aims of the paper. Gordon disputed two claims made by the *Kudzu* in their May issue: First, that "several hundred rounds of ammunition (were poured) into a fleeing crowd of young men and women," and second, that "no white law officer in this country has ever been convicted of murdering a black human being."¹¹²

Gordon closes with a heavy critique of the *Kudzu*'s writing style, lamenting the misspellings of certain words and other grammatical errors. "There are so many mistakes in spelling and grammar in the May *Kudzu*," wrote Gordon, "and so much bad writing – bad not

¹¹² The *Kudzu* Staff, "Editorial," *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), May 1970.

only in content but also in execution – that they burgeon the pretentiousness of the shaky philosophy. It's all based so strongly in trash and tripe and error and an overweening obscenity of thought and word that trying to read and discuss it boggles the mind.”¹¹³ While spelling and grammatical errors are not ideal, it is important to note that a grammatically sound publication was not the top priority of *Kudzu* writers. In fact, Doggett penned an editorial in the *Kudzu*'s inaugural issue that stressed the publication's willingness to see contributions from its readership, regardless of their writing experience. “The *Kudzu* is not for us to do and you to read, wrote Doggett. “It is a community undertaking.”¹¹⁴

Gordon's misdirected disdain for the *Kudzu* approach calls forth a statement from Doggett in which he confirmed the establishment's misinterpretations of the *Kudzu* ethos. Doggett mused:

They had no clue. I guess just because it was so different from them, they could not imagine that white people in Mississippi would do this stuff. They had to think that we were somehow controlled or led by some outside force or something. They totally misunderstood the whole thing.¹¹⁵

The Mississippi establishment worked together with law enforcement to suppress *Kudzu* efforts for the duration of the newspaper's publication. Anytime a *Kudzu* writer appeared in the public eye, whether it was at a demonstration or in a mug shot, the Hederman press reported it. Because *Kudzu* writers rejected the journalistic and social conventions embraced by Jackson's mainstream media, the negative attention from the Hederman press likely did little to hinder *Kudzu* publication; however, articles like Gordon's may have damaged public opinion of the underground newspaper, consequently damaging its sales.

¹¹³ Charles B. Gordon, "The Kudzu Syndrome," *Jackson Daily News*, May 31, 1970.

¹¹⁴ David Doggett, "The Vine," *Kudzu* (Jackson, MS), May 1970.

¹¹⁵ "Interview with David Doggett," telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

In the end, it was a combination of several things that forced the *Kudzu* staff to stop newspaper production. While pressure from the establishment made publishing hard for the *Kudzu* staff, the newspaper's financial difficulties proved most difficult to overcome. As Doggett recalled, the national counterculture movement lost momentum in the early 1970s. The *Kudzu* lost financial support when SSOC collapsed in 1969, and the newspaper endured additional fiscal constraints that resulted from an overall lack of interest in the publication in Jackson. Many *Kudzu* staff members left Jackson to pursue other academic and professional endeavors. Doggett too left Mississippi, not long after the *Kudzu* ceased operation in 1972. Of their efforts, he said, "It was the best thing I ever did in my life. We had fun doing it and we felt like we were accomplishing a lot . . . we could just never get enough advertising in Jackson to support the newspaper, and so we eventually had to give it up."¹¹⁶

As Doggett remembered, the May 1970 issue of the *Kudzu* was the newspaper's best selling issue. Before the Jackson State shootings, the publication had few black readers, but the staff recognized the establishment's role in both committing the crime and attempting to sweep it under the rug, and the *Kudzu* staff felt it their duty to report their perspective of the events. According to Doggett, *Kudzu* reports of the shootings largely aligned with the views of black Jackson residents, and for this reason, the newspaper's May issue offers valuable insight to the black community's response to the incident at Jackson State.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ "Interview with David Doggett," telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDIA AND THE MORATORIUM: THE *JACKSON ADVOCATE* COVERS THE 1970 BOYCOTTS

In the wake of the 1970 shootings at Jackson State College, Jackson residents found their city in turmoil. Black Jacksonians were outraged by what they considered a blatant abuse of power by law enforcement and other government bodies. White citizens feared additional demonstrations from black activists, and Mississippi's political establishment did its best to reassure white residents of their safety.

Jackson Mayor Russell Davis acted against the wishes of the city's white civic leaders and formed a biracial committee consisting of three white attorneys and two black attorneys to investigate the incident.¹¹⁸ The committee's responsibilities included interviewing key witnesses and reporting their findings to Mayor Davis within ten days of the appointment. Mayor Davis's committee held no legal power, but the selection of a biracial committee was unprecedented in Jackson.¹¹⁹

Black activists in Jackson anticipated a biased analysis from the investigative committee. In response, they formed the Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, hereafter referred to as the CCSC, an organization that aimed to "halt the unwarranted murders of Jackson State

¹¹⁸ George Whittington, "Mayor Names Bi-racial Panel to Probe Deaths," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 16, 1970.

¹¹⁹ Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College*, 91.

College students, community people, and to protest the genocide and systematic repression of black people in Mississippi specifically, and the nation in general.”¹²⁰

The CCSC distributed an eight-page document that outlined a range of concerns in the black community. The document included a list of demands made in an attempt to secure justice for black citizens who had suffered at the hands of the establishment. The document reveals a disconnect in the ultimate objectives of black activists in Jackson. While the committee’s demands reflect aspirations to secure racial equality in Mississippi, the document’s conclusion alludes to growing black power sentiments in Jackson:

Even though many blacks are very, very uptight about the violence perpetrated on their brothers and sisters across the state, they realize that they have not put together nor have they been able to sustain a concentrated drive toward total emancipation. However, it seems that many of them are saying, we’re dying like flies anyway, so why not fight fire with fire.

The aims of many black activists had shifted as social progressives abandoned the non-violent efforts advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr. and instead embraced the militant rhetoric of the Black Power Movement. These activists were unsatisfied with the results of the non-violent approach, and they began to employ more aggressive methods. Demonstrators on Lynch Street during the 1970 incident at Jackson State displayed their distrust of the city’s white residents as they shouted epithets and threw rocks at white motorists as they passed, and they cheered as a young black man set fire to a dump truck on campus. This behavior suggests that demonstrators in Jackson had followed the tactical swing to Black Power rhetoric, and the Jackson State shootings were, in some part, a product of increased racial tension spurred by the changing aims of black activists.

¹²⁰ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, Goals and Objectives, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, Accessed February 23, 2014, <http://collections.msdl.org:81/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/jsu&CISOPTR=157>.

Media accounts of the events surrounding the Jackson State shootings reflect the tense social environment in the city. Jackson's mainstream press published negative portrayals of black residents, or ignored them altogether, and some black media outlets in Jackson— in particular, the *Jackson Advocate* – reinforced the existing power structure as they succumbed to pressures from the white establishment.¹²¹ To counter the accounts published by the mainstream press and the *Jackson Advocate*, activists employed alternative forms of media, including the circulation of flyers and letters such as those distributed by the CCSC. The variations in media accounts from opposing sides of the conflict provide additional evidence to illuminate the complexities of the social and political dynamics in Jackson, and the accounts examined in this chapter explore concerns surrounding black power rhetoric in the boycotting of white businesses in Jackson following the campus shootings in May of 1970.

In his 1967 book with Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Stokely Carmichael urged black Americans to refute what he viewed as the nation's sanctioned form of discrimination: institutional racism. From his perspective, institutional racism was far more dangerous than acts of individual racism because it operated through establishments that were both accepted and respected by white society. Charles Silberman's 1964 book, *Crisis in Black and White*, influenced Carmichael's approach. Silberman wrote: "The tragedy of race relations in the United States is that there is no American Dilemma. White Americans are not torn and tortured by the conflict between their devotion to the American creed and their actual behavior. They are upset by the current state of race relations, to be sure. But what troubles

¹²¹ Julius Eric. Thompson, *Percy Greene and the Jackson Advocate: The Life and times of a Radical Conservative Black Newspaperman, 1897-1977* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 6-7.

them is not that justice is being denied but that their peace is being shattered and their business interrupted.”¹²²

Carmichael used Silberman’s assertion to dismiss the idea of a unified America. Instead, Carmichael called for an acknowledged separation of black and white cultures. He criticized the existing socioeconomic and political systems in the United States as he equated black Americans to colonists. “Colonial subjects have their political decisions made for them by the colonial masters,” wrote Carmichael. “Those decisions are handed down directly or through a process of ‘indirect rule.’ Politically, decisions which affect black lives have always been made by white people – the ‘white power structure.’” Carmichael continued in an explanation of how the processes of indirect rule create gaps between societal leaders and the masses. He wrote, “Black people must redefine themselves.”¹²³

THE CCSC AND EFFORTS FOR ACTIVIST COHESION

As black Americans identified differences between the governing bodies and themselves, the gap widened and the larger population rejected the notion that the leaders accurately represented the concerns of the masses. If the black population followed Carmichael’s suggestions, redefinition would require them to shed the characteristics and positions assigned to them by the white community, and the aims of Jackson’s CCSC reflected the black community’s desire to do just that, filling the societal gap through an assertion of strength, intellectualism, and creative agency.

The CCSC formed a list of fifteen demands that targeted the institutional racism referenced by Carmichael. The list required equal opportunities in economic, educational, and political arenas in Jackson. While the list suggested that the CCSC’s goals mirrored the

¹²² Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964), 10.

¹²³ Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, 4-37.

egalitarian aims of the civil rights activists, the ways in which the CCSC hoped to secure their demands pointed toward growing Black Power sentiments in Jackson. Again, the indistinct goals of the CCSC reflect the unstable milieu of Jackson's black community at the time of the shootings. Perhaps the CCSC was unsure exactly what it wanted long-term, but the committee understood that the existing establishment fostered a system that persistently placed blacks at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

The first item on the committee's list requests that Lynch Street be rerouted around the Jackson State campus. This demand sought to redirect responsibility of campus disturbances to Jackson State campus officials in an attempt to remove Jackson police and the Mississippi State Highway Patrol from the equation. Clashes between black activists and white law enforcement bodies were synonymous with Lynch Street, and the committee hoped to quell future possibilities of violence by reducing white presence in the area.¹²⁴ Placing Jackson State officials in control of the area near the campus would ensure that any disturbances be addressed by black officials who were better equipped to interpret and respond to the problems.¹²⁵

The CCSC demands also addressed concerns surrounding Mississippi's state education system. Because Jackson State was a state-supported institution, it fell under the control of Mississippi's all-white Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning. The board influenced public higher education systems across the state, and Jackson State was no exception. The CCSC called for "the halt of unilateral decision-making" of the board's president, M.M. Roberts. The item questioned the procedures used to determine final grades for students who were unable to finish coursework after the Jackson State shootings and subsequent campus

¹²⁴ Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State*, 14-17.

¹²⁵ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, *Goals and Objectives*, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, 1.

closing, the committee went on to demand that African-Americans represent at least fifty percent of the board. The committee reasoned that the board's all-white body "does not presently reflect the thinking of all segments of the [Jackson] state community."¹²⁶

The list of demands also included a request for "an equal allocation and distribution of federal and state funds to schools of higher learning." The CCSC claimed that the state's public black colleges, including Jackson State College, Mississippi Valley State College, and Alcorn College, "have never been given a fair share of their tax paying monies." As a state-funded institution, Jackson State relied on taxes paid by both black and white Mississippians, but public black colleges in Mississippi received a substantially smaller amount of state funding than public white colleges in the state.¹²⁷

The committee's list displayed additional concerns with Mississippi's public education system in a demand for a hiring of a proportionate number of black teachers in regard to the number of black students in public schools. The CCSC requested that black teachers and school administrators receive powers, salaries, duties, and responsibilities equal to those of their white colleagues. The item went on to acknowledge the problems that existed within the implementation of public school integration in Mississippi, and the committee demanded a "more realistic and workable solution to those problems" than what was in place. The CCSC believed that placing black educators with black students was a step forward in addressing the shortcomings of Mississippi's established educational system.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid, 4.

¹²⁷ Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, 24.

¹²⁸ Committee for Concerned Students and Citizens, Goals and Objectives, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, 5.

The CCSC also targeted Jackson's mainstream media outlets. The list called for the "immediate suspension of all the licenses of all television and radio stations in the State of Mississippi." The committee's concern centered in an overall lack of black television programs being aired and a low number of black employees in television and radio stations, but black Mississippians also suffered underrepresentation in print news outlets. The few African-Americans who were employed at these media outlets were censored, and thus were not able to offer meaningful contributions to activist efforts.¹²⁹ The call for equal employment opportunities echoed throughout the CCSC's list of objectives.

The committee addressed economic inequalities in Jackson by calling for the formation of a State Minority Commission Bureau. The proposed bureau would be responsible for securing financing for black entrepreneurs, as well as protecting the interests of black economic development. The bureau would also support black contractors in obtaining state and federal procurement contracts, and it would oversee these contracts in order to ensure that no state or federal regulations were violated.¹³⁰

The list also called for new appointments of black law enforcement officers. The committee demanded that the number of black law enforcement officers be proportionate to the statewide black population. This item required that black employees work within the existing establishment, but it also requested that black officers address concerns in the black community. This approach would simultaneously provide jobs for black Jackson residents and offer a law enforcement body better equipped to protect and serve the black community. Opening positions to black residents failed to completely dismiss concerns over white influence, but it would allow

¹²⁹ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, Goals and Objectives, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 4.

black residents to assume a degree of control over how law enforcement operates in the black community.¹³¹

The CCSC demanded “the investigation of police abuse of members of the black community,” and called for “community control over the activities of the police, including but not limited to hiring, firing, and promotion.” The committee continued with a request to implement a statewide grievance procedure to document and handle complaints against the highway patrol. In a later item, the CCSC singled out Inspector Lloyd “Goon” Jones, requesting his immediate termination from the highway patrol.¹³² The request to replace white authorities with black officials appealed to Carmichael’s position that whites were unable to offer adequate protection and direction for black communities. By designating black officers for black community concerns, the CCSC sought to ensure that black Jacksonians received the same protections offered to the city’s white residents.

The request for equal hiring practices extended beyond law enforcement bodies. The CCSC called for equal opportunity employment in local fire departments. The call included government offices, including the appointment of federal judges, federal prosecutors, and attorneys. According to the committee’s document, black residents constituted at least fifty percent of Mississippi’s population, and not a single black federal judge, prosecutor, or federal attorney was employed at the time. In May 1970, Mississippi had only one black congressman, Representative Robert Clark of Holmes County.¹³³ The document posited: “Justice can only be

¹³¹ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, Goals and Objectives, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, 2.

¹³² Ibid, 3.

¹³³ Sue Sojourner and Cheryl Reitan, *Thunder of Freedom: Black Leadership and the Transformation of 1960s Mississippi* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 261-266.

had when whites as well as blacks respect ‘the rule of law.’ The rule of law can be administered by blacks as effectively as whites and surely knows no color.”¹³⁴

The CCSC knew that the best way to gain the attention of the Jackson establishment was to target their economic livelihood, and the organization’s list of demands closed with a call for “all citizens, black and those few whites who are sincerely concerned” to boycott all white merchants in Jackson. The closing statement of the committee’s proposal encouraged blacks to do business with black merchants, granting them opportunity for economic gain. The committee urged demonstrators to picket and boycott “racist merchants” in Jackson, but the proposal did not stop there. It subtly encouraged participants to take necessary means in order to voice the concerns of the black community. The demonstrations “shall not in any way be limited to the above-named tactics.”¹³⁵

The committee required that white business-owners meet several demands in order to end the boycott. First, fifty percent of all employees in white businesses must be black. African-Americans must have equal opportunity to managerial positions, and the stores must purchase at least fifty percent of store merchandise from black suppliers. White owners must make an effort to employ black tradesmen for repairs needed in their stores, including overhead needs such as plumbing and electrical work.¹³⁶

The boycott proposal also asked citizens to cancel subscriptions to *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, two Mississippi dailies owned by the Hederman family of Jackson. The committee presented a list of demands to the newspapers, which included the immediate dismissal of two staff writers, Jimmy Ward of the *Jackson Daily News*, and George Whittington,

¹³⁴ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, Goals and Objectives, May 21, 1970, Jackson, MS, 6.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 7.

¹³⁶ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, *Goals and Objectives*, May 21, 1970, 7.

who wrote the majority of Hederman press articles surrounding the Jackson State shootings. The CCSC also required that the newspapers employ black reporters and desegregate the society pages. They targeted the journalistic integrity of both publications, claiming that the newspapers editorialized in news articles and printed racially biased news coverage.¹³⁷

Shortly after the incident, the CCSC began distributing flyers calling for a moratorium of white businesses in Jackson. One flyer read, “at this point the most powerful weapon we [the black community] have is the dollar. If we keep our dollars in our pockets and in BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES the power structure will lose its power.”¹³⁸

Boycott organizers distributed a list of close to 100 businesses to be included in the boycott. The list included 75 merchants on Capitol Street and 21 businesses on North Farish Street. Jitney Jungles, New Deal stores, and Sunflower stores across Jackson were to be included in the boycott – regardless of the stores’ locations. Passing information through these alternative media efforts proved successful as black Jackson residents joined the cessation, and the white business owners issued a quick response.

MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS RESPONDS TO THE BOYCOTTS

The Clarion-Ledger published reports of events surrounding the moratorium, but the newspaper avoided using the term, “boycott,” instead focusing on property destruction and vandalism that occurred during the demonstration. On May 22, 1970, *The Clarion-Ledger* published an article written by George Whittington titled, “Tough New Tear Gas, Guns Issued: Jackson State.” Whittington employed scare tactics to portray black boycotters as violent criminals. He quoted a nameless “veteran detective,” who calls the fire bombings of white

¹³⁷ Committee of Concerned Students and Citizens, *Boycotted List*, May 1970.

¹³⁸ Committee for Concerned Students and Citizens, *Flyer for Selective Buying Boycott*, May 1970, Jackson, MS.

businesses “the damndest campaign of fear I have ever seen.” Whittington reported eight incidents of fire damage to white businesses that occurred after the shootings at Jackson State. The article reassured the safety of white Jacksonians by detailing a new plan for increased protection from rioters. Whittington’s article served two purposes. First, it painted black demonstrators as dangerous, and second, it fostered a sense of security among white residents by assuring them that their local government was taking all necessary measures to ensure that Jackson law enforcement will, as Whittington wrote, “uphold the majesty of the law.”¹³⁹

The boycotts also attracted national media. The *New York Times* published an account of the boycotts three days before Jackson’s own *Clarion-Ledger*. The *Times* covered events surrounding the Jackson State shootings from the beginning, and its accounts typically criticized the positions of Mississippi’s white institutions. The newspaper published statements from black Jackson State students, as well as other black residents of Jackson, and the articles generally suggested that those killed or injured at Jackson State were victims of racially motivated crimes.

The *Times*’ Roy Reed first made note of the boycotts in a May 18, 1970, article titled “Blacks Start Wide Protest On Police Killings in South.” The article’s lead reported the boycotts as a response to the Jackson State shootings, and Reed did his best earn sympathy for protestors by writing that they were supported by moderate organizations that “have long advocated nonviolence and racial brotherhood.”¹⁴⁰ Although the boycotts were referenced in the article’s title, information about the protests went no further than the second paragraph, and Reed’s article gave little information beyond signaling the introduction of the boycott. The *Times* continued their coverage in an article published the following day.

¹³⁹ George Whittington, "Tough New Tear Gas, Guns Issued: Jackson State," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 22, 1970.

¹⁴⁰ Reed, Roy, "Blacks Start Wide Protest On Police Killings in South," *New York Times*, May 18, 1970.

“Mitchell Meets Mississippi Aides” told of one exception to the citywide ban on shopping at white-owned businesses. Throughout the boycott, the *Times* reported, blacks continued purchasing goods in white-owned gun shops, and the article reported the formation of a black, armed defense league. According to the *Times*, black Jacksonians aimed to defend themselves if future confrontations with law enforcement arose. The newspaper did make some effort to suppress notions that blacks were stockpiling weapons to commit violent acts against white Jackson residents, claiming that the influx in gun and ammunition purchases was “more for the psychological impact on the white community than for the hoarding of weapons.” This statement not only served to quiet rumors of black retaliation, but it also pointed to the city’s racial divide and a general lack of trust between blacks and whites in Jackson.¹⁴¹

Following a June 4 television address by Mississippi Governor John Bell Williams the *Times* again pointed its readers toward boycotts in Jackson. An *Associated Press* article published by the *Times* detailed the Reverend Ralph David Abernathy’s participation in the boycotts. Abernathy spoke to a crowd in Jackson following Williams’ statement, and he urged blacks to boycott white-owned stores in an attempt to demand equal job opportunities for black Jacksonians, requiring that the city’s fire departments and police meet a quota of 40 percent black. Abernathy said the boycott would “support demands for more Negro job opportunities.” This article supplied additional insight to long-term goals of the boycott by suggesting that the CCSC wished primarily to increase the economic opportunity of black Jacksonians instead of damage white businesses in Jackson.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ “Mitchell Meets Mississippi Aides: Confers With President of Jackson State College,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1970.

¹⁴² *Associated Press*, “Mississippi’s Governor Upholds Police in the Killing of 2 Negroes,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1970.

Another *AP* article, this time published in *The Clarion-Ledger*, focused on the destruction of white property in Jackson as a result of the boycott. The *AP* article quoted Williams. “Every means available to the state of Mississippi will be employed to make certain that all people of Mississippi will be able to live in their homes free from the fear of having their homes burned by some Molotov cocktail or their businesses destroyed,” said Williams.¹⁴³ He continued, “I hope that the people of Mississippi – neither black nor white – will permit themselves to be led further by the pied pipers of anarchy and insurrection.” Williams’ statement omitted a subtle warning that the state of Mississippi does not tolerate dissent. The governor urged residents of Jackson to “exercise restraint” in hopes that the city might return to a sense of normalcy. The *AP* article reflected a national fear of black militancy that extended well beyond Mississippi state lines.

Black activists used boycotting to protest political and social injustices through the Civil Rights Movement because buying power was an important part of the activists’ limited agency.¹⁴⁴ Although whites controlled the local government and dominated the economic landscape in Mississippi, blacks represented a large part of the population, so the lack of black business did not go unnoticed by white business owners.

The examination of goals and objectives of the CCSC, as well as the literature circulated about the boycott, suggested that at least some percentage of Jackson’s black community supported the forceful agenda suggested by Carmichael’s Black Power rhetoric. However, an analysis of articles from the city’s black weekly newspaper, the *Jackson Advocate*, revealed a message from different from that of boycott organizers and demonstrators. News coverage from

¹⁴³ Associated Press, “Will Preserve Order, Mayor, Governor Vow: Governor,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), May 22, 1970.

¹⁴⁴ John R. Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 71-75.

the *Advocate* offered insight to the complexities of breaking free from Mississippi's existing establishment.

Formed in 1939 by Percy Greene, the *Jackson Advocate* initially received wide support from black readers in Mississippi. Greene fought for education reform in Mississippi, and he consistently advocated voting rights for black Mississippians.¹⁴⁵ This work occasionally put him in the crosshairs of Jackson's white conservatives; Greene even went head to head with *Jackson Daily News* editor, Fred Sullens. "If that Negro newspaper the *Jackson Advocate*, keeps on talking about Negro voting and participating in politics," wrote Sullens, "there is going to be a lynching in Jackson, and that Negro editor, Percy Greene, is going to be in the middle of it."¹⁴⁶

Despite Greene's early work with the *Advocate*, the newspaper shifted its position in the 1950s. Greene adopted the accommodationist views of Booker T. Washington, who urged black Americans to earn their place in American society through education and economic advancement instead of forced integration.¹⁴⁷ Greene openly criticized the NAACP in the *Advocate*, and these actions distanced him from the civil rights activists. Julian Williams' "Percy Greene and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission" details the *Advocate*'s target audience as "responsible" blacks, or those who opposed civil rights organizations like the NAACP.¹⁴⁸ In effect, Greene marketed the newspaper to middle-class blacks with the most likelihood of economic and political mobility. This technique assured that the white ideals propagated by Greene would remain intact even if blacks gained political ground in Mississippi.

¹⁴⁵ Julian Williams, "Percy Greene and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission," *Journalism History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 67, accessed April 20, 2013, EBSCO.

¹⁴⁶ Julius Eric Thompson, *Percy Greene and the Jackson Advocate: The Life and times of a Radical Conservative Black Newspaperman, 1897-1977* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 46.

¹⁴⁷ Booker T. Washington and William L. Andrews, *Up from Slavery: Authoritative Text, Contexts, and Composition History, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1996), 101.

¹⁴⁸ Julian Williams, "Percy Greene and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission," *Journalism History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): accessed April 20, 2013, EBSCO.

In an editorial, Greene backed the “responsible white citizens who form the councils of authority in the community.” He compared civil rights efforts for integration to communist sentiments, an assessment commonly used by segregationists during the fight for civil equality. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, a state-funded group that investigated the actions of suspected civil rights activists, took notice of Greene’s position, and they soon recruited him as a paid informant.¹⁴⁹ Greene continued to push segregationist propaganda on the pages of the *Advocate*, but his readership waned as the Civil Rights Movement progressed. Circulation numbers of the *Advocate* vary depending on the source. Greene claimed that the newspaper sold 80,000 weekly subscriptions in the early 1970s, but historian Julius Thompson estimates the circulation at less than 12,000.¹⁵⁰ Even if Greene’s readership fell at the lower end, the number still represented a sizeable amount of Jackson’s black population.

The *Advocate*’s message concerning the 1970 boycotts of white Jackson businesses followed Greene’s gradualist position. In the days following the shootings, the *Advocate* reported very little of the disturbance at Jackson State or the investigations that followed, but it did make room for commentary on the boycotts. In three separate articles, the *Advocate* warned of the dangers of the boycott and called for an end to the demonstrations.

In an editorial titled, “Time For Negroes in Jackson and in Mississippi to End Boycotting,” the *Advocate* presented the embargo as a “get-rich-quick” scheme orchestrated by civil rights leaders. The editorial cautioned black Jacksonians, claiming that the boycott allowed black business owners to exploit black consumers by “continuing to buy from the white wholesalers to supply their businesses,” while asking black buyers not to purchase goods at

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.,” 67.

¹⁵⁰ Thompson, *Percy Greene and the Jackson Advocate: The Life and Times of a Radical Conservative Black Newspaperman*, 88.

white businesses. The editorial claimed that boycotting is a “totally false conception held by leaders of the civil rights movement” and “implemented into the minds of the less intelligent [and] less educated.” The *Advocate* went on to demand an immediate end to the boycott. “The time to end the boycott of white-owned establishments in Jackson and everywhere else in the state of Mississippi is immediately – and now.”¹⁵¹

The editorial repeatedly inferred that its readership was uneducated and unintelligent, and in doing so, the *Advocate* attempted to place itself in a position of authority. The editorial closed by comparing boycotts to boomerangs. “To the less knowledgeable and sophisticated we think it proper here to give some kind of definition of a boomerang.” The editorial continued with a weak analogy that claimed the boycotts had caused job loss in the black community through white retaliation. The *Advocate*’s editorial suggested to black readers that participating in the boycotts “may come to back to haunt you, like a boomerang.”¹⁵²

While current readers may find it difficult to devote serious attention to the *Advocate*’s statements, the circulation numbers reported in 1970 suggest that the newspaper held some influence in Jackson’s black community. This follows Michael Schudson’s discussion of the media and power relations, which suggests that the news media wields a power of its own. Schudson posits that the media may legitimate information – in this case the perceived negative consequences of boycott participation – simply by including it in the newspaper, which carries weight in the community.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ “Time for Negroes in Jackson and in Mississippi to End Boycotting,” *Jackson Advocate*, June 1970.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Michael Schudson, “The News Media as Political Institutions,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (June 2002): 265.

A second editorial in the *Advocate* condemned the boycotts. In “Ralph Abernathy and Negro Boycotting,” the newspaper again claimed that boycott organizers were taking advantage of less educated people. The editorial began, “everybody with any intelligence at all knows that the most powerful influence in this country is public opinion.” This approach follows Rodger Streitmatter’s observation of media’s propensity to “ignore or malign minorities,” but the *Advocate*’s coverage strayed from the typical occurrence of Streitmatter’s assessment.¹⁵⁴ Instead of ignoring or maligning members of other races, the *Advocate* published negative portrayals of the same demographic that the newspaper claimed it wanted to help. Here, the *Advocate* asserts its position as a guide for the social conduct of black Mississippians, but in ostracizing social activists, the newspaper reinforced the existing establishment and damaged efforts for increased economic and social mobility for Jackson’s black population.

“Ralph Abernathy and Negro Boycotting” went on to claim that the “most reliable barometer of public opinion in this country [was] to be found in the Letters to the Editor section of the “great newspapers and magazines of national circulation published in the United States.” The *Advocate* submitted that the number of published letters was proportionate to the number of letters received by the newspaper, and was therefore representative of a topic’s importance in the public eye.¹⁵⁵

To illustrate its point, the *Advocate* referenced three letters to the editor published in the June 5th, 1970, issue of *Life Magazine*. The targeted issue of *Life* published a total of 19 letters in its June 5 issue, and nine responded to the flood of campus disturbances in May of 1970. Each letter condemned the actions of college demonstrators; however, the *Advocate* neglected to

¹⁵⁴ Streitmatter, *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*, 237.

¹⁵⁵ “Ralph Abernathy and Negro Boycotting,” *Jackson Advocate*, June 1970.

tell its readers that the letters in *Life* never referenced the incident at Jackson State. Instead, the *Life* letters referred to the May 4, 1970 shootings at Kent State University in Ohio. Although the *Advocate* placed the *Life* letters in a separate context from which they were written, their position still offered additional insight to the *Advocate*'s coverage of the Jackson State shootings, as well as the national response to the incident. If, as the *Advocate* suggested, the number of letters published was a reflection of public opinion of an event, then the absence of references to Jackson State shootings was representative of the incident's significance in national consciousness.¹⁵⁶

By using the *Life* letters to connect the Jackson State shootings to those at Kent State, the *Advocate* grouped the incidents together, and while the demonstrations at Jackson and Kent were both motivated by the United States military campaign in Southeast Asia, the racially-motivated actions of Mississippi law enforcement grew from a complex social dynamic that was much different than that at Kent State. Because the social environment in Jackson was so different from that in Kent, Ohio, it is careless to compare the incidents to one another.

In "Local Negro Ministers Ignore Abernathy Call to Lead Picketing of White Business Establishments," the *Advocate* praised local black ministers for discouraging their congregations to participate in the boycott. The article claimed that the boycott had "been brought to an end primarily as the result of a front page editorial in the *Jackson Advocate*." Again, the newspaper attempted to place itself in a position of authority by claiming that its coverage influenced the actions of black Jackson residents. The article claimed that black ministers in Jackson "completely ignored the call of Reverend Ralph Abernathy," a local minister who participated in

¹⁵⁶ "Letters to the Editor," *Life*, June 5, 1970. The letters to the editor are republished in the June issue of the *Jackson Advocate*.

boycotts. Abernathy's involvement, as reported by the *Advocate*, was secured through last minute funding that brought the minister to Jackson in an effort to prolong the boycotts.¹⁵⁷

Even if readers accepted the *Advocate's* rhetoric as truth, the documents and flyers circulated by the CCSC, paired with a number of active boycotters, provided evidence of black power sentiments at the time of the Jackson State shootings. The demonstrators' decisions to abandon the non-violent techniques of civil rights leaders and adopt a more militant approach was evident in the non-traditional media approaches employed by the CCSC, and the success of the boycott illustrated the power of alternative methods of media communication. Despite this tactical shift, the CCSC communicated a lack of consensus in regard to the long-term goals of the boycott. Black activists in Jackson knew that the established system failed to adequately address social and economic problems that centered in the city's racial tension, but they lacked a consensus method by which to correct the system's failures.

The negative reactions from Jackson's mainstream press suggested that the moratorium succeeded on some level. *The Clarion Ledger's* coverage of the boycotts documented the economic agency of black consumers in Jackson as the establishment fought to reinstitute purchasing at white businesses, and the violent outbreaks from some demonstrators offered evidence of the shift in egalitarian rhetoric in Jackson.

Collectively, the media outreach from the CCSC and the coverage from the *Jackson Advocate* suggested that alternative communication methods had the potential to influence public response to an event. In the case of the 1970 Jackson boycotts, mass media's criticism may have supported the movement instead of stifling it. By publishing reports of the moratorium, the

¹⁵⁷ "Local Negro Ministers Ignore Abernathy Call to Lead Picketing of White Business Establishments," *Jackson Advocate*, June 1970.

mainstream media accomplished a feat that activists failed to do: it put the Jackson boycotts in the public eye as they adorned the front pages of Jackson's most powerful media outlets.

CONCLUSION

Today's news audience receives more media exposure than any generation in national history, but does the excess of coverage sharpen or blur an audience's understanding of an event? It could potentially do both. An awareness of the editorial leanings of specific news outlets is as valuable as the coverage itself. While readers may find it difficult to see the value of a news interpretation that differs from their prescribed political or social inclinations, a willingness to consider alternative perspectives allows for a more inclusive understanding of events. A consciousness of this sort may have served Jackson residents well in the aftermath of the Jackson State shootings.

If news is a cultural form, as Michael Schudson suggests, then media provides a vehicle by which members of specific cultural groups may receive news that applies to the individual's societal position. Schudson's claim illuminates the processes by which readers select the news outlets from which they obtain information, as well as the processes these outlets use to select and communicate the news. By choosing news sources that align with familiar cultural norms, a reader simultaneously receives news that strengthens the position of the news outlet, and by extension the cultural forms that influence the press, while also affirming the authority of the reader's culture.

As the study shows, the wide range of cultural forms represented in Jackson's media coverage is indicative of the varied perspectives of the shootings at Jackson State. Jackson's white community, with its hegemonic weight, dictated local news coverage of the event, and as a result influenced the dominant historical narrative. Jackson's mainstream press participated in

Troillot's narrative silencing processes, in this case suppressing the victim's perspective in favor of an alternative viewpoint that supported Mississippi's state agenda. To be fair, all media outlets participate in narrative silencing by selecting which occurrences deserve coverage, but those in positions of authority exercise strength not available to alternative news sources.

Although the Hederman press outlets were Jackson's principal news source, the publications held less weight on a national level. Media historians cite the newspapers as some of the worst news outlets in national history. In the days following the shootings, the incident held a prominent position in the pages of national newspapers, but the racial considerations of the incident caused the nation to label the incident as a Southern problem. As a result, the incident soon fell from national headlines, and the responsibility of documenting the shootings fell to news media in the Jackson area.

It is worth noting that a younger member of the Hederman family worked to repair the damaged reputation of his family's media legacy. In the 1980s, Rea Hederman took control of *The Clarion-Ledger*. A student of the University of Missouri's prestigious School of Journalism, the young Hederman's political leanings were a far cry from those of his forefathers, and he brought a fresh perspective to the newspaper. He hired a staff that reflected the cultural landscape of Jackson as it wrote to the whole of Jackson's population instead of the city's white elites. Hederman served as executive editor of *The Clarion-Ledger*, and his efforts changed the face of the newspaper. In a testament to the progress made by Rea Hederman the newspaper's 1983 news staff, many who were hired under Hederman, published a Pulitzer Prize-winning series on Mississippi education reform. The series documented a campaign led by Governor

William Winters that aimed to lift black schools across Mississippi to the standards of their white counterparts.¹⁵⁸

The changes in *The Clarion-Ledger's* coverage reveal not only a shift in the editorial position of the newspaper, but also the social progression of its audience. As the 1970s moved forward, state-enforced segregation subsided in schools and race relations in Jackson slowly began to improve. While there is always room for improvement, it is fair to say that today's *Clarion-Ledger* readers are removed from the racist ideals that dominated the lives of earlier generations of Mississippians.

In hindsight, it becomes easier to identify fundamental problems in the activists' approach. As Doggett recalled, black activists and white activists largely operated independently from each other. "It's just the way it was," he said.¹⁵⁹ Although the two groups shared a disdain for the Mississippi establishment, members of the counterculture and black social progressives found it difficult to identify with each other, and as a result, the two groups rarely joined efforts. The *Kudzu's* role in reporting the black perspective of the Jackson State shootings was an exception to this unspoken rule. The two groups stood side-by-side for a brief moment as they condemned the actions of Mississippi law enforcement, but the collaboration diminished as time passed.

If media serves as a foundation for the development of the dominant historical narrative, then the dissentious interactions between the various sociopolitical groups in Jackson, as well as the media outlets that represent the interests of those groups, aid in shaping the narrative. While

¹⁵⁸ Valerie Wells, "Jackson Free Press," *News Wars: The Rise and Fall of The Clarion-Ledger*, September 7, 2011, accessed March 01, 2014, <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2011/sep/07/news-wars-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-clarion-ledger/>.

¹⁵⁹ "Interview with David Doggett," telephone interview by author, March 14, 2014.

the news reports generated by marginalized groups such as Jackson's counterculture or its Black Power progressives may not be considered reliable historical sources, the study of the media representations that emerged from these groups still offers insights to their respective points-of-view. Ultimately, the value of the insights rests in their scholarly application, and a consideration of the multiple perspectives represented in Jackson's newspaper outlets strengthens the resources from which historians may construct narratives of the Jackson State shootings, consequently increasing opportunities to achieve a cohesive account of the events.

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